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The Mexican Transnational Family Experience in South Bend

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Introduction

Family is the most fundamental building block of society. The institutions of marriage and family link people and groups in a common social system (Kottak 2006: 374), and anthropological and sociological studies exploring seemingly all facets of the immigrant and transnational life have shed light on these most basic social institutions. These scholars have drawn attention to the need to explain exactly what “family” means in our dynamic society, which includes immigrants of Mexican origin who constitute the largest ethnic population in the U.S.: “The Latino family has a powerful influence on its members, and familial ties and loyalties probably exert an influence that is even more powerful than is typically observed in many non-Latino families” (Ready 2005: 34). Questions worthy of investigation include: How are Mexican families with members in two countries adjusting to the experience of long-term displacement and separation? Are these families changing their form, values, and even their purpose? Are shifts in family structure, child rearing practices, and family tensions a result of changing gender roles? Are other factors like economic changes and mass media influencing these shifts? Through in-depth discussion of relevant scholarly literature coupled with primary ethnographic research and interviews in the South Bend community, this brief aims to add qualitative depth to discussions of the transnational experience of the Mexican immigrant family in South Bend today.



Fortaleciendo Familias

Fortaleciendo Familias (“Strengthening Families”) is a weekly class held at La Casa de Amistad in South Bend. Its fundamental objective is to help strengthen the base of the family by bettering communication among the members. The instructors are concerned with relations between husbands and wives, as well as between parents and children. Every class begins with a home-cooked meal shared amidst open discussion among the families that lasts approximately thirty minutes, before dividing the class into three groups. Children under the age of 6 are taken by volunteers to a playroom for the duration of the session. Those between the ages of six and twelve go with a program instructor, Imelda, where they discuss topics such as learning to say “no” under peer pressure and how to better communicate within the family. The parents remain with the primary instructor, Sofia, where they listen to lectures as well as engage in discussions about family, specifically how it can be strengthened in the host environment of South Bend. Important topics include communication, the value of holding family meetings, methods for effectively rewarding and disciplining children’s behavior, and strengthening the bond between husband and wife. The program strives to strengthen the family as a whole by focusing its efforts on the entire family unit, both parents and children.



La Casa de Amistad Youth and Community Center is located at 746 S. Meade St. on the west side of South Bend.

What is a Family?

Throughout the United States and Canada, the ideal kinship group is a nuclear family. The traditional nuclear household begins with a husband and wife pair moving from the household of their parents in a neolocal (living away from one’s parents) residence pattern. The new nuclear family is then solidified with the birth of children and remains intact as long as the parents and their unmarried offspring live together in one home (Robbins 2001: 142). Each of the Mexican immigrant families from the South Bend and Elkhart, IN, area that participated in our ethnographic study defined family according to the nuclear family model. As one mother, Isabel, commented, “A family consists of mutual support between a couple, plus their children” (*El apoyo mutuo entre una pareja, más los niños*). Nuclear family organization and “relative isolation from other kin groups” is for the most part associated with geographic and social mobility—families often relocate away from their families of origin (the households of their parents) in

order to find work and achieve upward mobility (Kottak 2006: 386). This pattern is certainly exemplified by the families of transnational migrants. With regard to Mexican transmigrants, the modern conceptualization of family as nuclear and neolocal demonstrates a preferential shift in family relations and residence patterns from an extended patriarchal unit to a geographically isolated, nuclear unit. This adaptation seems to be in response both to transnational migration and a growing preference for smaller, more egalitarian families among the younger generation.

The Mexican Family

The nuclear families in the Mexican immigrant community in our study tend to be geographically isolated from other kin, which is difficult for them since close relationships with extended family, and high degrees of cooperation, collectivism, and *respeto* (being obedient and respectful) characterize the typical Mexican family. They compensate for the physical separation by forging and maintaining

long-distance relationships with their extended family members. This traditional family includes separate spheres for men and women, with the man’s sphere falling outside of the house, while the woman works domestically in the home (Hirsch 10). In recent years, this system has undergone a change as the distinction between gender realms is eroding. Observations at La Casa de Amistad have shown that men and women are beginning to share roles within the family. Sergio and Fernanda explained that it was Sergio who taught Fernanda to cook, since she had lived in her parents’ home—where her mother had done all of the cooking—until she married. Now, having seen the example set by his father, their son Emilio offers to help his mother with household chores. The gender divisions are beginning to blend together, however they have not been completely eliminated. When asked what differences they have seen between Mexican families and U.S. American families, immigrant mother

Marisol stated that according to her observations, the American wife often goes out with her friends and her husband goes out with his friends separately. In Mexican families, she explained, the couple almost always goes out together and, if there are children, the entire family goes out together. Devotion to family and a strong sense of community are of utmost importance to the Mexican family, which is considered “the cornerstone of social life and culture, a source of nurturing and support” (Ready 2005: 12; 30). Transmigration has inevitably made more challenging the strength of extended kin and community networks, resulting in a greater reliance and loyalty focused on the nuclear family.

Family Structure and Residence Patterns

While in the traditional rural Mexican family, relations were based on the more patriarchal, *respeto*-based structure where brides would join their husband’s family and live on

his parents’ land, there has been a noticeable shift to a truer nuclear family unit in which a married couple lives independently of extended family networks. One especially interesting observation was that the parents interviewed expressed a sort of nostalgia for the extended family presence and support (especially in child-rearing) which are characteristic of other types of postmarital residential patterns such as patrilocality (living with or near the father’s family) or matrilocality (living with or near the mother’s family) and which they associated with life in Mexico, even though all but one of them had themselves grown up in nuclear families there. This nostalgia seems to be an effect of the relative lack of supportive kin and community networks here in the U.S. for transmigrant families, which will be discussed in greater detail in a subsequent section of this brief.

All of the families interviewed for this study had migrated from Mexico City (Distrito Federal) between 4-10 years ago, and all of the children

were born in the U.S. The families live in nuclear units with a neolocal residence pattern, with no extended relatives living in the household. One of the parents, Jorge, had lived on his own in Mexico before marrying his wife Fernanda, who had remained in her parents’ home (family of origin) until marriage, as did another of the mothers, Marisol. Antonio and his wife Camila met and married after migrating to the United States, while all of the other couples had married in Mexico and migrated together afterward. Some of the parents have siblings living elsewhere in the United States or in Canada, but all of their parents (if living) still live in Mexico. Only one of the parents, Antonio, had grown up with extended relatives living together or near each other (“*en conjunto*”), while all of the others had grown up in nuclear families in Mexico.



“There has been a noticeable shift to a truer nuclear family unit in which a married couple lives independently of extended family networks.”

Marriage

Throughout history and across cultures, “the most common reasons for getting married are to have someone with whom (1) to share work, resources, and status; and (2) to raise children” (Ward 2006: 122). Marriage has typically centered around practical reasons such as procreation and economic needs, as opposed to individual preference and “falling in love” (Ward 2006: 122). In Mexico, marriages have undergone a change. The traditionally held conception of marriage is called *respeto*, which is a relationship based on respect. These marriages were not products of personal choice or premarital love. When older women have been asked to describe their marital

process, they do not describe it as a decision as much as a destiny. Marriage is viewed as a necessary social institution, and “for a marriage to be successful, what mattered was to know how to sacrifice and suffer, how to bend oneself to one’s husband’s will, not to know how to choose” (Ward 2006: 88). When evaluating a husband under the *respeto* mentality, the women concentrate “on family characteristics, not emotional compatibility” (Ward 2006: 159).

The modern attitude toward marriage is that of *confianza*, which includes a sense of trust and intimacy between spouses. They do not see marriage as an inevitable reality to which they must reluctantly adapt. Women of this generation value their ability to

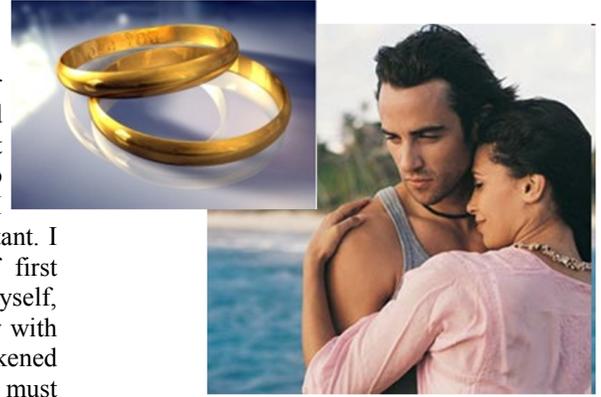
choose a life partner. When asked, “several of the younger women discussed the importance of having more than one boyfriend just for the experience” (Hirsch 2003: 159). This demonstrates an active search for a compatible mate. It is from this type of marriage, based on the pursuit of individual happiness, that the parents at *Fortaleciendo Familias* emerge. These couples have chosen each other as partners in a loving companionship. The mentality that connects love and marriage to form a partner-

Marriage, cont.

ship is evident by those who attend the class. Two of the three families that attend most regularly are represented by both parents, who both actively engage in the class. The other family is represented only by the mother, because her husband works all day until 9:00pm.

Shifting values toward a more companionate marriage rooted in *confianza* (trust) focus on the personalized relationship between two individuals rather than a simple carrying-out of a perceived “obligatory” social bond. This is demonstrated in the varying perceptions about love voiced by the families interviewed for this study. Isabel defined love as “Something that goes beyond just saying the word.

Love is sacrificing totally for another person.” Sergio asserted that “Love is many things, not just one thing. I can’t give love to my wife if I don’t love myself. I think that this is the most important. I have to be happy with myself first because if I am not happy with myself, how can she [my wife] be happy with me?” Sergio’s wife Fernanda likened love to a garden, saying, “One must maintain love with a strong base of communication and respect just as one maintains a garden by irrigating it. One must be always caring for it, watering, and throwing out the bad in order to keep the garden well-formed and maintained.” Rebecca Ruvalcaba, director of La Casa de Amistad added that love is more than simply a sentiment. One must work to maintain it.



“Love is the product of determination, not of sentiment” (*El amor es el producto de una determinación, no de un sentimiento*). These opinions value love as an important component in a marriage, marking them as marriages of *confianza*. This emphasis on companionate marriages coincides with a shift from larger families to smaller, more individualized nuclear units.

Family Size

Due to both generational factors and transmigration, the size of the typical Latino family is decreasing. A 2003 study by the National Center for Health Statistics rated the fertility rate of Mexican women at 3.2 children per woman. This rate is much less than the previous generation, which cited a national average in Mexico of 6.3 children per woman in 1970 (Hirsch 2003: 232). Reasons for the sharp decrease include: the economic shift from a land-holding farming and ranching family to employees and entrepreneurs in industrial and service occupations; the trend toward a more companionate marriage relationship; assimilation of migrants to “American” ideas of contraceptive use, as well as the shift to individualist rather than collectivist parenting styles; and, the lack of supportive kin networks for transmigrant families in the U.S.

First, Mexican mothers express a desire to “have time to get to

know their children as people and guide their developing personalities”—a more individualist orientation—and giving them the love and attention that their own mothers often could not because they were distracted with the responsibilities of having so many other children to care for as well.

Second, the geographic isolation of the nuclear family in the U.S. and



resulting absence of an extended kin network also influence a couple’s decision to have fewer children because there is not as much support for parents, both of whom likely work full time, in caring for children. In the traditional Mexican farming family, aunts, uncles, and grandparents help raise the child, but here in the U.S. the families are by themselves. Parents feel overwhelmed.

Third, having fewer children means that parents can better ensure greater upward mobility for both themselves and their children (Hirsch 2003: 253). Achieving all of what parents hope to provide for their children economically—including a higher education, clothes, toys, etc—is much more feasible with a smaller number of offspring. Finally, the trend toward companionate marriage means that spouses value the creation of strong ties based in a *confianza* relationship with each other and their children, making time to be a couple in addition to coparents (Hirsch 2003: 243; 253).

“Mexican mothers express a desire to ‘have time to get to know their children as people and guide their developing personalities’—a more individualist orientation.”

Family Values

For the majority of Mexican transmigrant families—and most families of any background—family values are instilled and cultivated in each individual from the earliest age. Antonio and Camila, parents of 16-month-old Carlitos defined family values as “the things one believes and that one teaches to his or her child from an early age” (*Cosas que uno cree y que se enseña a sus hijos desde pequeño*). Some of the most important of these values, they said, include always behaving oneself well and not being jealous. Marisol, a mother of two children, added that respect, honesty, and decency (*respeto, honestidad y honradez*,) are also core family values parents should be sure to teach their children. Their beliefs paralleled those highlighted in another study of parental development goals for children of immigrants, which revealed

that Mexican mothers, among others, hoped their children would develop including cooperation, good manners, affection, and obedience as well as diligence, leadership, assertiveness, and personal success (Tamis-LeMonda 2008: 195).

When asked where children should learn these values, all of the parents interviewed in this current study cited that this moral development should come from the child’s parents. “Children learn from us” (*Los niños aprenden de nosotros*), Julia, a mother of three young daughters, said. The parents emphasized the increased importance of consciously being a strong role model for their children in the absence of other relatives, such as grandparents, to help raise the child in family values. They also expressed concern about their ability to spend as much time raising

their children as they hoped to since in several households both parents held full-time jobs. With both mother and father working and no extended relatives nearby, parents worried that children were at higher risk to fall into bad situations such as drug addiction or teen pregnancy. The desire to mitigate such threats to traditional family values has motivated parents to seek out sources of support such as La Casa de Amistad and *Fortaleciendo Familias* to reinforce and enhance strategies to them to become better parents in the unfamiliar and challenging environment of their new country. A brief discussion of what constitutes individualist versus collectivist cultural perspectives will help explain why these challenges are being experienced.

Raising Individuals

Whereas in the society of the Mexican farming families of the previous generation, interdependence among a large family unit was the ideal, in societies like that of the United States, the individual is idealized. Parents in a “sociocentric” culture are charged with raising members who will cooperate. The most important developmental goal for parents in collectivist cultures is relatedness, emphasizing connection to the family, an in-group orientation, respect, and obedience (Tamis-LeMonda 2008: 186). By contrast, parents in individualistic cultures encourage their children to develop into “independent, autonomous individuals” and emphasize values of personal choice, intrinsic motivation and persistence, self-esteem, and the realization of individual potential.

Transmigrant parents differ from

their own parents who still live in Mexico in their style of child rearing, but as we have seen with shifts in family size and residence patterns, these changes seem more influenced by generation and an ever-changing society than by transnational migration. However, the geographic isolation of nuclear families caused by migration has undoubtedly contributed to a shift from the more traditionally Mexican collectivist nature to the more individualist character of U.S. culture. In other words, parenting styles seem to reflect a culture of raising individuals rather than raising interdependent members of the collective family unit.

However, it is not accurate to speak of individualism and collectivism in a dichotomous framework, located on opposite sides of a geographic border. Changes in immi-

gration, technological advancements, and economic and political trends have blurred the lines of space and culture, meaning one cannot understand parents’ philosophy for socializing their children as uniformly collectivist or individualist. Instead, the relationship seems better described as one of functional dependence, which indicates an interrelationship between the two value systems where one seemingly functions to promote the other. For example, relatedness may



be seen as a pathway to autonomy or vice versa. In other words, parents may feel that by allowing their children to express themselves (autonomy goals), children will in turn confide in their parents and remain close to the family (relatedness goals) (Tamis-LeMonda 2008: 194). Thus, *both* autonomy and relatedness are key values parents hope to teach their children.

Primary ethnographic research and interviews with families at La Casa de Amistad in South Bend provide several qualitative examples of a general shift to more individualist-oriented parental philosophies. Julia, a mother of three daughters, explains her efforts to communicate with her daughters about feelings: “I ask (my daughters) about what they are feeling, how was their day, what’s bothering or hurting them, what their desires are...I teach them and I explain to them what I feel in order to encourage them to share with me what they are feeling too” (*Voy preguntándolas de como se sienten, como fue su día, que les duele, cuáles son sus deseos...Yo enseño y explico lo que me siento para animarlas a compartir conmigo lo que se sienten también*). This reflects a more individualist ideology of parenting, stressing to children the importance of recognizing and vocalizing one’s own emotions and desires.

Another example details parental concerns about the well-being and development of their children. Parents Sergio and Fernanda decided to enroll in the *Fortaleciendo Familias* class at the recommendation of their pediatrician after expressing concerns about their 3-year-old son Miguelito, who is quite temperamental and also suffers from separation anxiety and a fear of being alone. His parents are somewhat desperate because they don’t know how to deal with his behavior. He often refuses to eat and has lost quite a bit of weight, and he is extremely “enojón” or easily angered/belligerent. “We don’t know how to get through to him. We talk to him well, we hug him, we talk to him lovingly, but he is very



easily angered and belligerent. I don’t know how to communicate with him.” (*No sabemos como llegar a él. Le hablamos bien, le abrazamos, le hablamos con cariño pero es muy enojón. No se como comunicarme con él*). Ruvalcaba tried to reassure Fernanda that the fact that Miguelito behaves differently from his siblings Emilio (5 years old) and Javiera (1 ½ years old) should not be cause for extreme concern: “The character of each child is different. The second child is different from the first. Sometimes something that works with one child will not work with another.” This assessment reflects a more individualist perspective, which treats each child as an autonomous individual with a distinct personality and unique needs.

Mexican immigrant parents want to raise their children as individuals but at the same time worry about problems that such individual autonomy causes for the well-being of the family. For example, as Ruvalcaba and the families agreed, children in the U.S. seem to be waiting until they reach the age at which they can distance themselves from the home (*alejarse de la casa*) and be independent, even to the point of severing ties with the family. This desire for a life independent from that of his or her parents differs from the traditional Mexican family, which often took on the patrilocal model. Eduardo, a father of two adolescents from a previous relationship and two toddlers with his current wife, expresses these concerns by contrasting the attitude of teenagers in México and the U.S.: “In México it doesn’t happen very much that the youth is just waiting to reach the age to leave the house. And here (in the U.S) you do. Here the truth is that once you begin to scold

when the child is 14 or 15 years old, he says to you ‘As soon as I’m old enough, I’m leaving (for good).’ And this is one way of separating families.”

Additionally, the idea of acknowledging a child’s wants is new for Mexican immigrant parents transitioning from a more collectivist upbringing to a more individualist one. Treating children as small individuals with unique desires and tastes also alters expectations of parents to provide certain luxuries more than just the necessities to their children such as throwing each child a birthday party (Hirsch 2003: 246). The emphasis is on celebrating the child and his or her achievements, as also evidenced in lavish First Communion parties and even “graduations” from kindergarten. This new mentality has also contributed to the decrease in family size, as women who want time to raise their children as individuals are adamant that such a degree of attention and love is only possible with fewer children (Hirsch 246).

Sofia and Imelda, the instructors of the *Fortaleciendo Familias* course at La Casa de Amistad asserted that, more than anything, Latino immigrant parents need to realize that their experience raising their children will be much different from how they themselves were raised: “The parents need to realize that they are in a different country, it is a different time, and that they need to ‘esforzarse’ (put forth conscious effort) to understand and employ strategies discussed in class—such as effective communication and properly rewarding or disciplining behavior—in order to become better parents.”

Language

In her class, Sofia emphasized the need for the transmigrant parents to learn English. She is not suggesting that they replace their use of Spanish with English. Rather, she explains how it is important to have knowledge of English if they wish to stay active in the lives of their children as they grow. It is often the only way that they can communicate with their children's schools. If they do not learn English adequately, they will be forced to rely entirely on the children to act as translators, making the parents dependent on them at a period in their lives that children typically depend on the parents. This role reversal can lead to a loss of communication between the parents and the child, as well as a loss of respect or challenge to parental authority. It has been found that "more than a quarter (27 percent) of Latino children grow up in linguistically isolated households—households in which there are no members who speak English very well" (Ready 2005: 30). This fact is visible through observation of the families who attend *Fortaleciendo Familias*, as they all rely predominantly on Spanish and have minimal knowledge of English.

One phenomenon of the bicultural and bilingual nature of transmigrant families is the increasing use of "Spanglish," a mixture of Spanish and English, especially among the youth..



Delinquent Behavior

Studies have shown that there is a "link between acculturation and problem behaviors for Mexican Americans and showed increased involvement in delinquent activity and greater susceptibility to antisocial peers among more acculturated adolescents" (Roosa 2000: 53). Observations of the Mexican-American youth incited class participants to reveal that, from their perspective, there is a high rate of juvenile delinquency among teenagers in South Bend, which has sparked concern among parents. Marisol, mother of 12-year-old Liliana, expressed her worries about the behavior of preteen and teenage girls. She told a story about a 12-year-old peer of her daughter who became pregnant, and that she fears the chain reaction that seems inevitable among kids of that age. For this reason, there is a general concern regarding children of the pre-teen and teenager age group. Imelda addresses these specific issues with girls of that age at *La Casa de Amistad*. She works with the older children to help keep them from becoming delinquents (*Para que no caigan en el riesgo*)—drugs, gangs, truancy—helping them with strategies to stay focused on school, to say no with conviction, to understand that every action has a consequence, and that each individual has the personal power to decide what they feel or what they think. Gang violence is another reality among the youth of the West Side of South Bend, also known as "Little Mexico." It has been observed that "pandillas [gangs] provide a social structure of belonging that youth want and need, but that their parents cannot readily provide (Smith 207). In South Bend, gangs and juvenile delinquency are "a result of a variety of peer pressure which preys especially on the desire for brotherhood and family" (Leary Cortez 5). Apart from centers such as *La Casa de Amistad*, additional programs in South Bend dedicated to providing positive alternatives to gang participation include "Street Smarts" through the Boys and Girls Club and South Bend Police Department Youth Boxing program (Cortez 6).



Discipline

When asked about the difference between their own child rearing in Mexico and the way they are raising their children in the United States, punishments were presented as one difference. Marisol explained that in Mexico, whenever she or other children she grew up with did something wrong, the parents would spank their children without hesitation. However, in the United States the parents do not resort to this because they live in fear that the children will report them to the police (*No se puede dar una nalgada por el miedo de la policia*).

Supportive Kinship and Community Networks

“By not having extended family nearby, the parents feel that their children are being deprived of an important aspect of growing up.”

Although living *en conjunto* with extended family members occurred more frequently among their parents’ generation than their own, the transmigrant parents interviewed in this study did grow up with a larger network of relatives close by—or at the very least, much closer than they are now. They worry about the effect that the absence of grandparents, aunts/uncles, and other extended relatives will affect the development of their children (*Los hace falta*). The families do not travel to Mexico very often, and financial struggle and immigration policies prevent relatives from visiting the U.S; thus, the families explained, children’s relationship with grandparents and other relatives is primarily based in telephone and internet communication. By not having extended family nearby, the parents feel that their children are being deprived of an important aspect of growing up. Antonio, the father who had grown up with his grandfather and uncles very nearby, described the significant role these relatives played in his upbringing. They taught him values and led by example just as his parents did, and even taught



him things that his parents could not. Here in the U.S., since immigrant families function in geographically isolated nuclear units, such extended family support is not available. One of the mothers gave the example that when one falls ill in Mexico, her mother or an aunt is there to help her take care of the children, cook soup for her, and take care of her while she is ill. Here, she says, one can go to the doctor, but then must carry on and get back to work without missing a beat.

According to some, the problems caused by the lack of a supportive social network are aggravated when both parents work outside of the home. Ruvalcaba and Sofia, the instructor of *Fortaleciendo Familias*, both discussed the fact that in the 1950s and 1960s families were more united; there was more contact and a closer relationship with grandparents, and mothers stayed in the home to raise their children. Now, both parents are essentially forced to work in order to maintain a house and provide for children (*mantener la casa*), and grandparents are

not around to help care for children, meaning that relationships and communication between spouses is further strained, and parents are unable to spend as much time with their children as they would like. For example, Marisol—the only parent that comes alone with her children—does indeed have a husband, but he works from 7am-9pm. “I hardly ever see him” (*Casi no lo veo*), she says, joking that she should leave him a note on the table to which he could respond each day, and that they could communicate that way. As Sergio commented, children also suffer in this arrangement because their parents are so focused on work that they do not spend enough quality time with their children.

There is also a lack of support within the community. Sergio and Fernanda, as well as Antonio and Camila said that nearly all of their neighbors are Mexican, but “they almost never look at us” (*casi no nos miramos*). “The Mexican is envious, egoistic” (*El mexicano es envidioso, egoista*), they say. With regard to work, especially, the couples explain,





There is a need for more community-building organizations for Latinos in the South Bend area.

Women enjoying informal conversation and friendly company at a community center.



coworkers are “easy to get along with” (*de buena honda*) while Mexican colleagues—“those of our same race” (*los de nuestra misma raza*), Camila emphasizes—do not want to help each other because they are very competitive about work hours. “[Mexican jealousy,] is ugly, it’s really ugly” (*Es feo, es realmente feo eso*), Sofia lamented. It is understandable, then, that Mexican transmigrant families seem only to trust and rely on their nuclear family unit.

So, where can the Mexican transmigrant family find the supportive social network that they lack here in the U.S? The families cite community centers such as La Casa de Amistad in South Bend—which offers after-school programs for children and classes such as *Fortaleciendo Familias* to help strengthen family bonds and community relations through lectures and open discussion—

as being great places to build ties in the community. Churches and other social centers offer a good environment, especially for women, to get together and chat (*platicar*) or to do crafts or make small items (*hacer manualidades*), but they lament that there are not many places or activities available; there are a few in South Bend, but none in Elkhart where two of the families live. Sofia said that she had suggested to La Casa director Rebecca Ruvalcaba that they create a club for young girls to attend with their mothers to *hacer manualidades* and have open discussion, but as of yet no such program has been created. Additionally, Sofia and the families agreed, all of the activities in existence are only for Hispanics. They would like there to be more activities with other ethnic groups to foster stronger community bonds between them. Hopefully, such ideas will be realized in the near future to facilitate the emergence of the supportive social networks that are currently lacking for Mexican transnational families in the South Bend area.

“Community centers such as La Casa de Amistad in South Bend offer programs to help strengthen family bonds and community relations through lectures and open discussion.”

Hopes for the Future of the “Minoría Mayoritaria”

Mexican immigrant parents have high aspirations for both their own and their children’s future. When asked what they hope to have achieved in 10 years, the parents in our study most frequently cited three main goals. The first was to attain a better job and even establish a defined career, which would allow them enough economic security to be able to work less in order to spend more time with their children. Second, they dream of earning a higher level of education perhaps even university education

which will allow them upward mobility in the labor force. One mother, Isabel, voiced that she felt confident in the educational opportunities this country has to offer Mexican immigrants, including bilingual GED classes. Third and most importantly, parents aspire to have the ability to give their children a good education and a good life.

These hopes expressed by the immigrant parents we interviewed closely parallel those cited in the book *Challenging Fronteras*, which in-



cluded home ownership, better jobs, and furthering individual development: “After they had settled in the United States, most women generally associated the proverbial American dream with higher education” (Repack 1997: 254). Most of the mothers dream of college or graduate school for their children, and the overwhelming majority say they themselves also want to take classes and to learn new skills in the United States.

Not all parents are as optimistic about their own futures, but rather focus on gaining the ability to give to their children what they themselves did not have. For example, Antonio, father of 16-month-old Carlitos said he doesn’t believe that he or his wife will have the chance to acquire more education: “Now that we’re adults, we cannot have more education because we did not do so when we were younger.” Instead, he hopes to have achieved a level of economic stability that will allow him to provide a solid education and a good life to his son and to “prevent something from happening to him” (*prevenir algo con él*) with regard to the risk of Carlitos falling into habits of truancy or drug use.

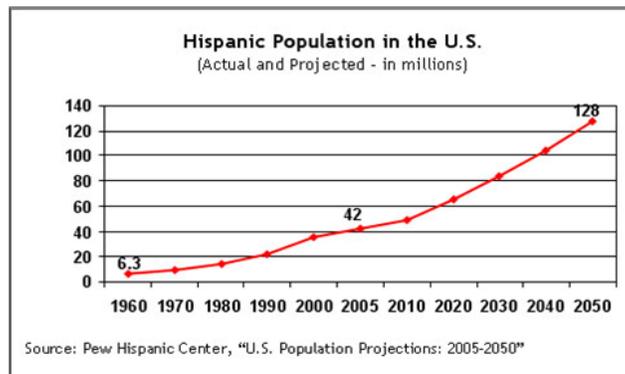
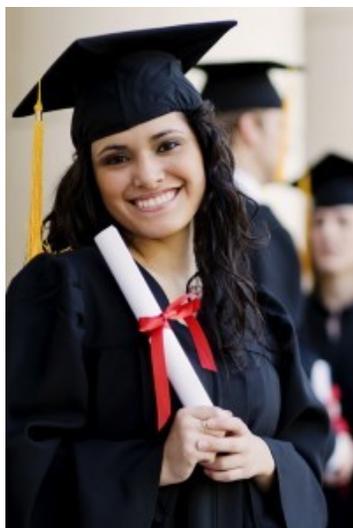
When next asked what they hoped their children will have achieved in 10 years time, all of the parents stressed the critical importance of a good education. Fernanda, a



mother of three, commented, “My oldest son is 5 right now. In 10 years he will be 15, and many times by this age young girls are pregnant and young boys already have *las cosas*” (“the things,” meaning problems, namely drugs). Education, the parents assert, will prevent their children from falling into these troublesome life paths.

The responsibilities Latino parents feel and their aspirations for their children are effectively summarized by the frequent reminders from Sofia, the instructor of the *Fortaleciendo Familias* course at La Casa de Amistad: “In 2050 Latinos will be the majority. We Hispanics will be the ‘minority majority.’ Therefore, you must remember that in our hands,

well, in *your* hands is the *future* of this country because you are the base and your children will be the parents of the children of that future generation” (*En 2050 nos ocupamos a ser mayoría. Los hispanos vamos a ser la “minoría mayoritaria.” Entonces hay que recordarlos que en nuestras manos...bueno...en sus manos está el futuro de este país porque ustedes son la base y sus hijos van a ser los padres de los hijos de esa generación*). According to Sofia, by the year 2050 Hispanics will be the majority population in the U.S., and they will inevitably hold leadership roles in the government, business, and other key sectors of society. Therefore, she said, there is a great pressure on Latino parents to ensure that the youngest generations are raised well.



Far Left: One of the greatest hopes Mexican immigrant parents have for their children is that they will achieve a high level of education.

Near Left: By the year 2050, Hispanics will comprise the largest minority group population in the United States.

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*All names of family participants interviewed for this study have been changed to protect confidentiality.

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