AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

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Title: Finding Personal Power through Literacy: Latina Women's Transformative Learning Experiences in Two Family Literacy Programs

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This research focused on the experiences of 15 low income Mexican women immigrants participating in *MAS* and *Superando*, two family literacy programs at the center of these women's sociocultural change. This research sought to understand the extent to which participation in these two programs empowers women to create change in their lives. Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory was used to guide this work.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 15 women. The interviews were transcribed and translated verbatim, then codes were developed using an open coding method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Results from the qualitative analysis revealed that participation in these two family literacy programs fostered transformative learning in the lives of the women interviewed. All participants related experiences that reflected the essential elements of transformative learning, beginning with a dilemma or life crisis or major life transition. Other phases included self-examination, critical assessment of assumptions, recognition that others have shared

similar transformations, exploration of new roles or actions, development of a plan for action, acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing the plan, tryout of the plan, development of competence and self-confidence in new roles, and reintegration into life on the basis of new perspectives.

The women related a broad range of positive outcomes as a result of program participation, including increased self esteem, self-confidence, and decreased feelings of loneliness, isolation, fear, and depression. As the women became empowered and began to explore new roles, this inevitably resulted in changes in their closest relationships. Many of the women reported interacting with their husbands in very different ways, including being more assertive, more communicative, and more independent. These changes that the women made through their transformative learning experiences were the outermost manifestations of their learning and development, which resulted in a power shift in their relationships with their husbands.

The findings indicate that the program fostered healthy family relationships through increasing the women's capacity to effectively communicate their needs in their relationships. This research has important practical implications for practitioners and policies, especially for the development of interventions for low-income Latino families.

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Finding Personal Power through Literacy: Latina Women's Transformative Learning Experiences in Two Family Literacy Programs

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Marina L. Merrill

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APPROVED:

Redacted for Privacy

Major Professor, representing Human Development and Family Studies

Redacted for Privacy

Chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences

Redacted for Privacy

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Marina L. Merrill, Author

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my first and most influential teachers, my grandmother, Marian Braisted Zimmerman, who read me my two favorite Beatrix Potter books, *Squirrel Nutkin* and *Peter Rabbit* tirelessly; and my mother, Nancy Zimmerman Merrill, who made many sacrifices so I could have the best education possible. These two women personified the family literacy model and without their love, guidance, and support this dissertation would never have been possible.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Recent immigrants face tremendous challenges in making a quality life for themselves in the United States. Many live under difficult circumstances, characterized by limited resources and access to economic opportunities. Moreover, the lack of English language acquisition and cultural differences pose significant barriers, as immigrants navigate complex systems that are often confusing.

Family Literacy programs are currently a key strategy for helping immigrants assimilate and negotiate life in the United States. Family literacy programs offer parents of children under age eight (at the time of entry to the program) the opportunity to learn English, and increase their educational attainment, as well as learn life, job, and parenting skills. These programs can also provide assistance and comfort to immigrant families struggling with the pressures of resettlement (Wrigley, 2004).

Family literacy programs are a useful intervention for Mexican immigrants. The effectiveness and importance of these programs is well documented, however, researchers have failed to explore how these programs may impact the lives of their participants well beyond literacy and job skills. My project explores how family literacy programs affect the acculturation processes and personal relationships for recent Mexican women immigrants. Questions about gender and culture were also considered, including how programs may influence women's thinking about gender issues within their own daily lives and relationships. This research aims to close gaps in the literature by addressing the intersection between gender, culture, and family literacy.

This area of research is becoming increasingly important as the burgeoning Latino population in the United States is dramatically increasing the number of immigrant and English as a Second Language (ESL) students served in family literacy programs, such as the federally funded Even Start. The most recent national evaluation of Even Start indicated that 46% of participants served by Even Start identified themselves as Latino as compared to 17% in 1989-1990 (U. S. Department of Education, 2003). Latinos are now the largest minority group served by Even Start.

The racial/ethnic background of Even Start participants has important implications for the design and delivery of program services. Racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity presents the challenge of developing culturally sensitive and appropriate instructional materials and approaches.

Family literacy is very complex, however, and entails much more than presenting diverse families with culturally appropriate and sensitive materials and approaches. Gadsden (2004), for example, argues that family literacy programs cannot just address literacy alone and must consider the issue of cultural difference or convergence while they also consider language differences. Family literacy programs often do not address the cultural transition and transformations that occur during the process of immigration that frequently result in a new identity (Osterling, 2000; Quintero, 1999).

Another area that has not adequately been explored by the literature is the complexity of the intersection between literacy, gender, and culture. Programs primarily serve women and their children, yet the program is entitled *family* literacy.

Gadsden (2004) raises this important issue by asking: "Who are the members of the unit family served by family literacy programs or considered by family literacy programs in developing missions and curricula?" (p. 411).

In theory, the term "family" in family literacy not only includes the mother and child but also the father, older children and other members of the extended family. However, family literacy programs have primarily served mothers. For example, only 7% of participants served by Oregon's Even Start family literacy programs are fathers. The national evaluations of Even Start only refer to the participants as "parents" and define the term "Even Start Family" as "the nuclear family that includes at least one adult and one child participating in Even Start, and, in all but unusual cases, living in the same household" (Tao, Gamse, & Tarr, 1998). There is no discussion of the actual gender of program participants in the national evaluations. However, other studies and statewide evaluations have documented that most programs serve mothers, because women have traditionally been children's primary or sole caregivers (Gadsden, 2003; Klassen-Endrizzi, 2000). Fathers also have not traditionally participated in family literacy programs because some fathers serve as the primary breadwinners and therefore, do not have the time to participate.

The issue of father involvement or lack thereof raises important questions about how gender issues are approached and discussed in programs (Gadsden, 2004). Gadsden, for instance, raises issues about service delivery, including how boys and girls are taught literacy skills, instructional materials used for boys versus girls, and the nature of interactions encouraged between parents and children based on gender. These topics are important to consider, and illuminate some of the gaps within the

literature related to gender and family literacy. Further research is needed that extends beyond instructional components to include how family literacy programs may change the way participants think about the embedded structures of race, class, and gender and how these structures influence their participation in family literacy programs.

My research topic was generated from three focus groups that I conducted with Mexican immigrant women participating in family literacy programs. In each focus group some women discussed how their husbands created barriers to their participation in the program. Participants related that their husbands were threatened by their greater independence and access to resources, social support, and education. For example, one participant shared, "my husband does not like what I learn here. The empowerment classes teaches me to stand up and speak out for myself, to use my voice, that I have value. He does not like it. He does not like the change inside of me."

This dissertation explored how program participation shapes and changes the ways in which Mexican women immigrants negotiate gender roles within their homes. This research examined how family literacy programs affect the acculturation process for recent immigrants. Further, this research explored the extent to which Mexican immigrant women's perceptions about themselves and their lives have been transformed as a result of participating in a progressive family literacy program that includes participatory education and an empowerment component. This dissertation research specifically addressed the following key research questions:

1. To what extent do recent Mexican women immigrants describe transformations in their own lives and experience personal empowerment through participation in a family literacy program?
2. How do women's perspectives about gender change during the course of participating in a family literacy program?
3. How do these transformations and changes in identity impact their intimate partner relationships and family dynamics?

Theoretical Perspective

My work is guided by Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory. Transformative learning theory is particularly applicable to this research, because it provides a lens through which to view literacy learning experiences (Mezirow, 1991, 1996) and cultural change (Kennedy, 1994; Taylor, 1998). The theory addresses the complex issues of both adult learning and adult development (King, 2005). Transformative learning is a process of how adults construe, validate, and reformulate the meaning of their experience and develop autonomous thinking (Mezirow, 1978). Transformative learning occurs when adult learners critically reflect[1] on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously make and implement plans that bring about new ways of defining their reality. Transformative learning is essentially a vehicle to empowerment and consists of several phases beginning with a dilemma, life crisis or significant life transition (Mezirow, 1991). Other critical phases include self-examination, critical assessment of assumptions, recognition that others have shared

[1] Critical reflection is one of the most critical components that can lead to transformative learning. The critical reflection process facilitates people in recognizing their social location in the world and their community. Critical reflection also helps individuals recognize their strengths and this process enables learners to expand their potential to learn (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001).

similar transformations, exploration of new roles or actions, development of a plan for action, acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing the plan, tryout of the plan, development of competence and self-confidence in new roles, and reintegration into life on the basis of new perspectives (King, 2005).

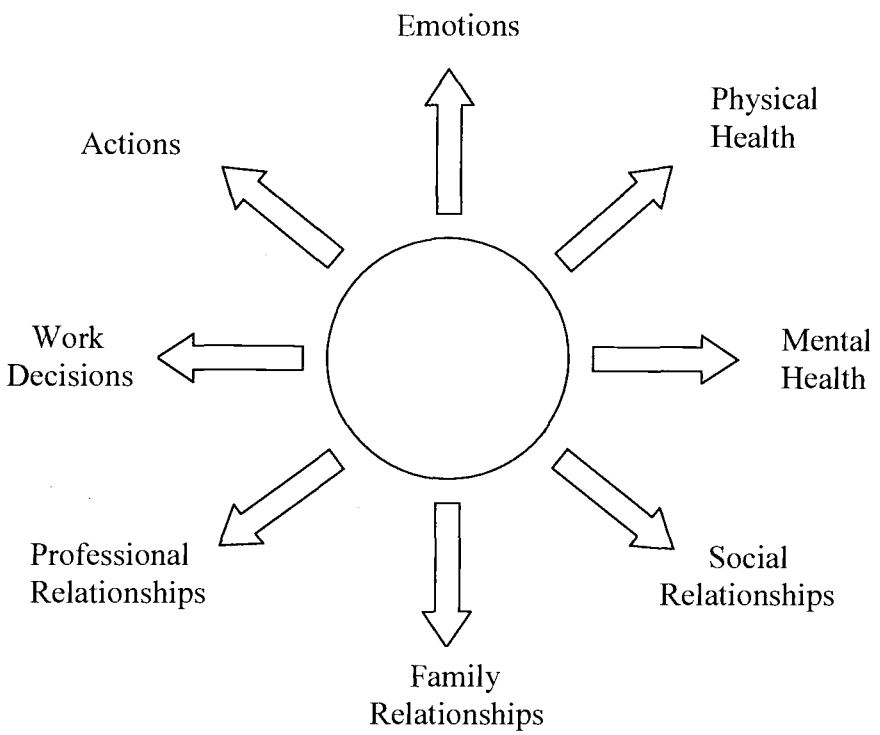
As adult learners engage in learning new skills, content, and concepts, new ways of understanding themselves and their worlds emerge (Belenky & Stanton, 2000; Dirkx, 1997). Transformative learning extends beyond learning specific knowledge or a skill set, instead it involves a new framework for self-understanding. O' Sullivan, Morell, and O'Connor (2002) have worked to expand the theory beyond the adult education classroom to include a wider range of settings for which adults can experience transformative learning opportunities, including spiritual, environmental, and political arenas to cite a few. The following quote illustrates the authors' contribution:

> Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations (p. xvii).

At the center of transformative learning is the process of meaning-making and the epistemology of the learner (King, 2005). As Kegan (2000) aptly states, transformative learning is not about *what* we know so much as *how* we know it; the theory grapples with the *processes* of learning and the development of new frames of reference. When learners experience transformative learning they learn appropriate new ways to deal with the constant changes and challenges of their daily lives (Mezirow, 2000).

King (2005) states that transformative learning deepens the adult learning experience and extends far beyond the formal classroom experience, and impacts multiple arenas within adult's lives. She writes, "the stories of transformation tend to be the 'big' stories of dramatic changes, but sometimes the changes are not visible in the classroom. Sometimes the changes have an effect on other aspects of individual lives" (pg. 9). King (2005) utilizes case studies to illustrate how self-confidence in the classroom translates into concrete outcomes for other arenas in learners lives, including, family, work, and community. Figure 1 is adapted from King (2005) to illustrate the far reaching impact of transformation learning.

Figure 1. The Potential Impact of Transformative Learning



Analyzing the experiences of recent Mexican immigrant women participating in family literacy programs, utilizing the transformative learning framework, can

provide a window into the participants' learning experiences and perspective transformations. The purpose of this research is to explore how these transformative learning experiences, particularly transformations in the women's thinking about gender, class, and power in turn impact family dynamics, particularly the marital dyad.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review the following three distinct content areas and the intersections between them:

1. Latino families in the United States with a particular emphasis on Mexican American families.
2. The dynamic gendered roles of Mexican immigrant women and families.
3. The Even Start Family Literacy Programs.

The chapter begins by describing Latinos in the U.S., and cultural characteristics of Latino families, with an emphasis on recent Mexicana immigrants. The chapter then reviews the status and changing gendered roles of Latinas in the United States. The final section of the chapter will contain an overview of the Even Start Family Literacy program and a description of the unique family literacy programs, *MAS* and *Superando*[1], from which this study will draw its participants.

Latinos in the United States

The influence of the Latino population on the American society is vast and diverse, with numerous implications for family research, professional practice, and public policies. Scholars and professionals need a deeper understanding of the various Latino individuals and families in this country. It has been all too common to view all

[1] *MAS* (Mujeres con Animo de Superacion English Translation: Women with the will to move forward) and *Superando (*to excel, overcome, surpass*)* are program pseudonyms that were suggested by the program coordinators. I wanted the pseudonyms to be similar to the actual program names, to reflect the programs different approach to family literacy. The actual program names were chosen by the participants within the first year of the grant, so they could feel a sense of ownership of the program. Several names were suggested and voted on. This is significant, because the majority of Even Start programs in Oregon and nationwide, use Even Start in their program title (e.g., The Beavercreek Even Start Program).

Latino families in this country as homogenous, with similar values, beliefs, resources, behaviors, and concerns (Andrade, 1982; Chilman, 1993; Frisbie, 1986; Mirandé, 1980; Vega, 1995). These sweeping assumptions are seriously flawed (Chilman, 1993; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Latinos represent a variety of different national and ethnic origins, vary by social class, speak a number of dialects, have differing histories and citizenship status, religious beliefs, skin color, and live in various regions of this country.

The first part of this section will provide general demographic and immigration facts about Latinos. The second section discusses characteristics of Latino families, while the third section will specifically focus on Mexican Americans in the U. S., with a particular emphasis on women and their evolving dynamic gendered roles.

Group Identification

Fundamental to the understanding of a group of people is properly identifying the group. The term Hispanic has been the global identifier typically applied to this extraordinarily diverse sub-population of North Americans by the U. S. Bureau of the Census (Martinez, 1993). However, some individuals find this term offensive, because it refers either to people who immigrated from Spain or to descendents of Hispanic or Indo-Hispanic ancestors who resided in what is presently the Southwest when it was under Spanish and later Mexican rule, insensitive to the Indian and Mestizo (mixed racial) backgrounds of most Mexican Americans. The term is also not inclusive of groups with origins from Central America, South America, Cubans, or Puerto Ricans.

In response to the sharp criticism of the name Hispanic, the term Latino became popular in the late 1970's and 1980's within ethnic groups and the newspaper

medium, because it was seen as a more neutral term (Griswold Del Castillo & de Leon, 1997). The shift towards using this term indicated an increased recognition of the complexity of the nation's Spanish-speaking population (Griswold Del Castillo & de Leon, 1997). The term Latino refers to a national Spanish-speaking community with a majority of Mexican ancestry but inclusive of the large populations of Central and South Americans, Cubans and Puerto Ricans.

The problem of preferences for ethnic labels does not end there. Generally, native-born people with roots from Mexico, for example, prefer the term Mexican-American, while Mexican immigrants prefer the term Mexicano (masculine) or Mexicana (feminine), and another group of individuals prefer to be called Chicano or Chicana. Individuals who identify themselves as Chicano/a represent a cultural group that recognizes and takes pride in their racial mixture, particularly acknowledging their Indigenous or Native American ancestry, and perhaps more importantly, are consciously aware of their social and political oppression in American society (Martinez, 1993).

Within this dissertation, I use the term Latino when I refer to the Spanish speaking community inclusive of people with multi-ethnic backgrounds. I will refer to the participants in my study as Mexican immigrants or Mexicanas. When I use the term Chicano/a I am most likely discussing individuals who self-identify as Chicano/a for political reasons. In general, when I am discussing a particular study or individual, I will use their chosen ethnic identifier.

Demographics

Latinos are the largest ethnic group and the fastest growing population in the United States (Guzmán, 2001). Between 1980 and 2000 the Latino population grew by 58 %. On the whole, Latinos make up 13.3 % of the U.S. population and 40.2 % is foreign born (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). Of the foreign born, 52.1% entered the country between 1990 and 2000.

Many of the recent immigrants have limited proficiency in English. Spanish is the second most common language spoken in the home after English, with 11% of the population over the age of five reporting Spanish as their native language (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). This is a dramatic increase of over 64% within the past decade.

These trends are not expected to slow down, either. The Latino population is expected to continue to grow rapidly. It is projected that by 2010 one out of every seven people will be Latino and by 2050, nearly one in every four Americans will be Latino (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000). This rapid increase is due to both higher fertility rates among Latinos and to high levels of immigration (Griswold Del Castillo & De León, 1997).

Age

In comparison to the population as a whole, the median age of Latinos is fairly young (Therrien & Ramirez, 2001). The median age of Latinos is 10 years younger than the population as a whole, and 34.4% of Latinos were less than 18 years of age in comparison to only 22.8% of the general population (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). The Latino population has substantially more children than non-Latino Whites, yet many fewer elderly (U. S. Census Bureau, 2001). This comparatively youthful age has

a number of implications for public policy, given the likelihood that schools and programs targeting young children will have a disproportionately large number of Latino children in them (Chilman, 1993).

Economic Characteristics

Latinos are more likely to live in poverty than non-Latino Whites. In 2002 21.4% of Latinos were living in poverty, compared with only 7.8% of non-Latino Whites (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). Particularly alarming is the percentage of Latino children living in poverty. In 2002, 28% of Latino children were living in poverty compared to 9.5% of non-Latino White children. One in five Latinos experienced material hardship in 1995, a rate double that of the total U.S. population (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). The most frequently cited hardships include medical need, food insufficiency, and telephone disconnection (Beverly, 2001).

Educational Attainment

On average, Latinos have lower educational attainment than any other population group in the United States (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000). More than two in five Latinos aged 25 and older have not graduated from high school (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). In addition, more than one-quarter of Latinos have less than a ninth-grade education (27%) in comparison with only 4% of non-Latino Whites. The proportion of Latinos with a bachelor's degree (11%) is also much lower than for non-Hispanic Whites (29.4). These lower levels of education for most Latinos are largely a result of the recent immigration of many of them, as well as poverty and low levels of education in their native countries. Continuing problems of low educational attainment for Latinos is a matter of serious concern, because it adversely affects their future

employment opportunities and greatly increases the likelihood that they will experience poverty.

Family Household Size and Marital Status

Latinos live in larger households than those of non-Latino Whites (Ramirez and de la Cruz, 2003). In 2002, 26.5% of Latino households consisted of five or more people, as compared to only 10.8% of non-Latino White households. Among Latino households, Mexican families were the most likely to have five or more people.

Latinos were more likely to never have been married (36.3%) than non-Latino Whites (24.5), however non-Latino Whites were more likely to have been divorced than Latinos (10% compared to 6.6%). Interestingly, Mexican American divorce rates increase with higher levels of education for women, though the reverse tends to be true for non-Latino Whites (with the exception of women with graduate educations). Some researchers speculate that Mexican American women with higher levels of education tend to become more acculturated to American life and are, therefore, more accepting of separation and divorce; however, this may oversimplify the situation (Chilman, 1993; Frisbie, 1986).

Immigration Issues

Each year the number of unauthorized immigrants in the United States grows by 350,000 and a large proportion of that number are Latinos (U. S. Immigration & Naturalization Services, 2003). An estimated 87% of the total unauthorized immigrant population in the United States is Latino, either from South America or non-Canadian North America. Of the total Latino population in the United States, 17% are estimated to be unauthorized immigrants, and of those, over two-thirds came from Mexico.

Contemporary observers have referred to this rapid growth of Latinos in the United States as the "Latinization of America" (Williams, 2001). These comments, however, ignore history and current social reality (Griswold del Castillo & de León, 1997). The Mexican people and their culture, in particular, have been continuously present in this territory for the past 400 years. In fact, a significant number can trace their roots back to before the time an international border existed between the United States and Mexico (Garcia, 2002).

The most recent influx of unauthorized immigrants is due to greater numbers of Latinos seeking to enter the United States than provided for under current immigration laws, because of the severe economic and political problems within their own countries (Chilman, 1993; Griswold Del Castillo & De León, 1997). This rising tide of immigrants, primarily from Mexico, has led to intense debates over the economic and cultural consequences associated with immigrants (Griswold Del Castillo & De León, 1997). This debate has become increasingly heated since the September 11th terrorist attacks, as public and political pressure to close the borders to protect the U. S. have grown (Andreas, 2002; Waslin, 2003). This recent surge in preventing illegal immigration has made it more difficult for immigrants to travel back and forth between Mexico than in previous decades.

This debate is not new and some scholars posit that illegal immigrants could be prevented from entering the United States, but that business and industry do not want this to occur (Chilman, 1993; Portes, 1979; Ramos, 2003). These immigrants come to the United States prepared to work, are an enormous source of cheap labor, and the fact that they are illegal creates an advantage for their employers.

It is essential for family researchers, policy and program personnel, and practitioners to recognize the severe problems families experience when they have entered the country illegally. These families live in continuous fear of being discovered and as a result can be difficult to serve if they need assistance. Further, they are ineligible for public assistance and have to largely rely on private sources for help.

Mexican Americans

Of all Latinos in the United States, Mexicans comprise the largest ethnic group as 67% identify themselves as having Mexican origins (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). Mexicans are a heterogeneous group and have been described as the most diverse of all the Latinos on a number of characteristics. The diversity stems from a number of variables, namely the time of immigration, recent Mexican immigrants versus fifth or sixth generation, class, and urban versus rural community of origin (Abalos, 2004). Only recently has the diversity and complexity of this ethnic group been considered by social science researchers (Hurtado, 1995; Griswold Del Castillo & De León, 1997; Umaña-Taylor & Bámaca, 2004). In the past, researchers have largely treated this ethnic group as homogeneous, ignoring within group diversity.

Despite the differences Mexicans do share a common history and some key cultural characteristics. The majority of Mexicans are *Mestizos,* meaning that they are of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry. Their heritage stems back many centuries to Indigenous civilizations that existed before the arrival of the Spaniards in the early 1500's. During the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, Spain ruled over the region that is now Mexico, California, and the southwestern United States (Garcia,

2002). Mexico obtained its independence from Spain in 1821, but struggled to gain control over its vast territory (Griswold Del Castillo & De León, 1997).

In 1848 the United States acquired the land that now includes Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming from the Mexican War. Texas won its independence from Mexico in 1836, and was annexed by the United States in 1845. Since these territories have been claimed the number of Mexican immigrants that have come to the United States has ebbed and flowed. Political and economic reasons have been the driving force behind periods of large waves of Mexican immigration. For example, there was a large increase in Mexican immigrants during the Mexican Revolution of 1910 in order to escape the violence (Chilman, 1993), but during the Great Depression immigration slowed to a trickle (Garcia, 2002; Griswold Del Castillo & De León, 1997). Again in the 1970's Mexico's crushing economic crisis led to another upsurge in Mexican immigrants fleeing the country to escape hunger and extreme poverty.

Although the majority of Mexican Americans live in the Southwest, many have migrated to other regions within the United States. The most recent influx of immigrants in particular have migrated to various locations allover the country. Mexican migration patterns follow employment opportunities.

The U.S. Census has tracked Mexican immigrants in the Pacific Northwest since the early 1900's (Griswold Del Castillo & De León, 1997). Mexicans from California originally moved north to Oregon to work the sugar, pea, potato, and apple crops, and some remained as permanent residents. Between 1990 and 2000 the number of Latinos in Oregon increased by 144%, accounting for 8% of the total population. Of

those, 79% were of Mexican origin (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000). These percentages, however, probably underestimate the actual number of Latinos, because they likely do not include unauthorized immigrants.

Mexicanas

Mexican women in the United States share some common structural characteristics and experiences. Chicana's are primarily of working-class origin, disproportionately poor in comparison to Chicano men, and despite several generations in the United States have not experiences significant social or economic mobility (Hayes-Bautista, Hurtado, Valdez, & Hernández, 1992; Hurtado, Hayes-Bautista, Valdez, & Hernández, 1992). Chicanas also experience persistently low levels of educational attainment (Gándara, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999).

Chicanas are also frequently concentrated in jobs that Catanzarite (2002) calls "brown collar jobs", which are often nonunion, pay minimum or below minimum wage, have few benefits, and are seasonal and/or very insecure (Morales & Bonilla, 1993). Other Chicanas work in the informal sector as domestic workers or in-home child care providers, experiencing irregular work hours, with little or no regulation of their working conditions, and no benefits. They often work under the table, meaning that they don't pay into Social Security, leaving them extremely vulnerable when they age and can no longer work (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994).

Chicanas' experiences are embedded in Mexican history, with its tradition of complex class and racial hierarchies against the backdrop of Catholicism and language repression, especially towards indigenous people (Castañeda, 1993; González, 1999). Moreover, with the passage of GATT and NAFTA, trade restrictions were opened

creating shifts in the politics of globalization. In an era of economics based on information, technology, and globalization, the continuous migration and settlement of Mexicans in the United States is a part of a global reconfiguration that shows no signs of discontinuing (Arredondo et al., 2003).

Presently, Mexican migration and settlement is creating enormous changes that affect all aspects of women's lived experiences (Arredondo et al., 2003). These changes include increasing class differences, the feminization of the labor force, and struggles related to citizenship and basic human rights. The burgeoning Latino population in conjunction with increasing nativist U. S. politics is creating a very large sector of the population with a lack of educational opportunities (Flores, & Benmayor, 1997). Social science researchers have recently noted that what is really needed is the examination of gender within the context of these social and economic changes (Arredondo et al., 2003; Griswold Del Castillo & De León, 1997; Vega, 1995).

Cultural Characteristics of Mexican American Families

Despite the diversity among Mexican Americans, most social scientists have identified distinctive cultural characteristics that the majority of Mexicans hold in common (Garcia, 2002; Hurtado, 1995; Mirandé, 1980; Vega, 1990; Zapata & Jaramillo, 1981). Understanding both their shared values as well as differences is essential to conducting research with and providing culturally competent services for Mexican families. This section will highlight the shared values, beliefs, and attitudes of Mexican families.

First and foremost, Mexicans place a high value on maintaining strong family ties (Hurtado, 1995; Marín & Marín, 1991; Solis, 1995). A number of studies have

documented the role of the family for Latinos, and apply the term familism to describe the priority that family holds for them in their lives (Angel & Tienda, 1982; Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Marín & Marín, 1991; Zambrana, 1995). Familism is defined as the reciprocity and solidarity that both nuclear families and extended kin networks share (Clayson, Castañeda, Sanchez, & Brindis, 2002). Further, it refers to the expectation that family will be the center of support and individual family members will place interpersonal relationships with family over individual achievements (Marín & Marín, 1991). Research has found that regardless of acculturation levels, Latinos perceive and value a high level of family support in comparison to Anglos (Keefe &Padilla, 1987; Sabogal, Marín, & Otero-Sabogal, 1987).

Several researchers have attributed the greater emphasis of familism amongst Mexican Americans to their unique definitions of what constitutes significant interaction between family members and their extended definition of family (Hurtado, 1995; Williams, 1990; Dilworth-Anderson & Marshall, 1996). Mexican Americans are more likely to live geographically close to their families and rely less on e-mail, letters, or long-distance phone calls to maintain family ties, whereas researchers argue that Anglos do not have as strong a need to have frequent face-to-face interaction with kin or to live in close proximity to them (Hurtado, 1995; Keefe, 1984). No sharp distinction is made between relatives and friends, and the latter are considered kin if a close relationship has been formed. The term that is often used to describe this high level of family permeability is *compadrazo* (Vidal, 1988).

Familism is manifested in a variety of ways, including the larger household structures of Mexican Americans (Hurtado, 1995). The larger household structures

likely stem from the fact that support is provided not only by the nuclear family unit, but also by grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and friends (Williams, 1990). Intergenerational households are common when the family members live in the same country, but even if families are separated by borders the intergenerational ties remain strong (Vega, 1995).

Studies on recent immigrants, however, indicate that immigrants have smaller social networks than non-immigrants (Golding & Burnam, 1990; Griffith & Villavicencio, 1985; Vega & Kolody, 1985). Researchers reasoned this was because immigrants primarily rely on family members for emotional and instrumental support (Vega, 1995). This is more likely because immigrants are not established and may be relatively isolated when they first come to the United States. Mexican immigrants typically come here because relatives invite them here to live and are their only source of support until they make further contacts.

Much of the literature related to Latino immigrant families, as well as ethnic families in general has focused on acculturation (Dunkel-Schetter, Sagrestano, Feldman, & Killingsworth, 1996; Hurtado, 1995; Vega, 1995). Acculturation refers to the process of how individuals and families change in values and communication patterns as they are exposed to different cultural beliefs and practices (Vega, 1995). This is a profound and very complex process.

The literature on acculturation is, however, contradictory. Some research has found that this process is not a destabilizing factor for most Mexican immigrant families (Cabassa, 2003; Vega, 1995). While a growing body of literature indicates that immigrants may experience acculturative stress (Amaro, Whitaker, Coffman, &

Heeren, 1990; Caetano & Clark, 2003; Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1996; Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994; Hovey, 2000; Vega & Amaro, 1994). These studies report that acculturation is associated with family dysfunction and higher levels of deviant behavior, especially teen pregnancy and drug abuse. Further, stress associated with acculturation is linked to low income and negative expectations for the future (Hovey, 2000). Immigrants may experience stress because they may experience conflict between their cultural values, isolation from their culture of origin, and face difficulties adjusting to their minority status. More research on acculturation is needed as the long-tem consequences of the acculturation of Latino families has not carefully been studied (Cabassa, 2003; Vega, 1995).

Becerra (1988) argued that the acculturation experience for Mexicans is different than that of other immigrant groups, because of the proximity to their native land and because of the large number of Mexican immigrants living in the United States. It is believed that Mexicans will be able to maintain their cultural values and language of origin because of this continuous interaction in the United States with other Mexican immigrants and through visits to Mexico. In addition, Mexicans may perceive their life in the United States as better than in Mexico and experience reduced acculturative stress.

Vega (1995) notes that "there is a dearth of theory about how acculturation affects Latino family adjustment, especially models that are focused on adaptation rather than dysfunction" (pg. 11). He also maintains that the long-term consequences of acculturation on Latino families have not been carefully studied. Further, Vega points out the need for more qualitative studies on Latino families, which according to

him, more adequately capture the emotional enigma of individual and family relationships in regards to the complexity of studying acculturation and familism.

Latino Families and Changing Gender Relations

One of the fastest growing bodies of literature within Latina studies is the dynamic nature of gendered roles within families (Garcia, 2004). Presently, there is a movement away from overly simplistic descriptive explanations predicated on *machismo* and toward an understanding that gendered roles are flexible and responsive to environmental circumstances (Baca Zinn, 1982; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Hurtado, 1995; Pesquera, 1984; Vega, 1995; Ybarra, 1982). The early research on Latino families presented Latino families as singular, with traditional patriarchal values, where wives were passive and full-time homemakers. Researchers hypothesized that this family structure developed as a protective mechanism to insulate families from racism in American society and to socialize children in order to retain traditional Mexican values (Ortiz, 1995).

These traditional depictions have been heavily criticized, particularly by feminists. For example, Hurtado (1995) describes how Latino families have largely been misconceptionalized by social science researchers in the past, "the focus on gender averted the persistent conceptual cul de sac where Latino families are either a tangle of pathology or an undifferentiated human mass of collective values" (Hurtado, 1995, pg. 56). She argues that our knowledge of Latino families has been advanced most by studying gender relations. According to Hurtado, gender studies scholars analyze families as a unit where structural influences, such as sexism, racism, and labor market segmentation strongly influence family members.

Research has documented that in recent decades how Latinas have challenged and redefined their status, entering wage work, improving their educational levels, and shifting their roles and responsibilities within families (Anderson, 1996). This transformation, however, has been gradual, contradictory, and uneven. The shifts in the Mexican American gender system have been a part of a larger transformation in gender relations as changes in the circumstances of women's lives in postwar America have dramatically changed (Chafe, 1991).

In an extensive review of the literature on Latina women in the United States since the early 1900's, Anderson (1996) draws some conclusions about the roles and status of Latinas. First, she concludes that Latinas vary greatly, depending on class membership, migration status, interactions with members of the dominant culture, family structure, age, country of origin, region within country of origin (rural versus urban), as well as other factors. Anderson (1996) also observes that Latinas are rapidly changing and it is difficult to disentangle causes from consequences or to fully understand the implications for women's empowerment and well-being.

Anderson writes, "in the realm of gender ideology Chicanas...have experienced a complex process whereby their resistances have weakened certain normative constraints while other limitations (often more subtly encoded and enacted) have proved obdurate" (pg. 152). Because gender ideology shapes the division of labor, power, and resources among women and men in families and the general society, gender ideology is controversial (Pesquera, 1984; Ybarra, 1982). According to Pesquera (1993), the only way Chicanas have changed the distribution of household labor is through conflict and confrontation. She found this to be true across classes and

regardless of education level. These structural shifts have intensified ideological conflict in Chicano families (Anderson, 1996; Hurtado, 1995; Pesquera, 1984; Ybarra, 1982).

Scholars caution against the view that Mexicanas have already achieved equality simply because they have begun to claim power over ideology and resources within the family (Baca Zinn & Dill, 1994; Hurtado, 1995). Women's use of power may appear substantial when it is measured against an expectation of complete subordination (Pesquera, 1993). Moreover, Chicana feminist scholars caution against assuming that American families are models of egalitarianism, ignoring the reality that Western women still face varying levels of oppression and experience patriarchal constraints as well (Baca Zinn, 1980; Ortiz, 1995; Williams, 1990; Zavella, 1987). As is true in other American families, the gendered division of labor in the household has changed only minimally (Anderson, 1996). Expectations centering on women as nurturers remain high and the gender division between influence and authority remains intact in many Chicano families (Pesquera, 1993).

Anderson (1996) observes that Mexicanas have made more progress in utilizing the resources made available to them by the American political economy to enhance their power within their families more than altering major institutions. Their increased participation in the labor force has been especially important in this process of change, but labor force participation has not automatically translated to a pronounced change in gender roles or expectations (Baca Zinn, 1980; Hurtado, 1995; Pesquera, 1984; Williams, 1990; Zavella, 1985). For example, Latinas' authority to participate in family decisions has increased as result of working outside of the home,

not as a result of Latino men in these families voluntarily relinquishing power (Hurtado, 1995).

At the same time that women's entry into the labor force has aided Mexicanas' struggle for power, women are more likely to feel the contradiction when they enter the public realm (Anderson, 1996; Hurtado, 1995). For example, Zavella (1985) studied Chicana cannery workers and found that husbands complained that their wives' political organizing and work took too much time and as a result felt that their wives were neglecting their families.

This structural context has set limits on Mexicana's ability to transform their status, particularly within the family. Poverty, discrimination, and job insecurity continue to impose barriers on Latinas' education, labor force participation, and reproductive control (Anderson, 1996). Moreover, the lack of structural accommodation to women's dual roles has created strains and ambivalences for Mexicanas (Hurtado, 1995).

Although the literature on gendered roles within families is rapidly growing (Garcia, 2004) and has progressed our understanding of Latino families, there are still unanswered questions and gaps within the research. Our knowledge of the newest waves of immigrants and how they negotiate gendered roles within their families is limited. Most of the research in this area has been with Chicanas, or women who have been living in the United States for at least two generations. Moreover, we do not know how interventions, such as family literacy programs may influence women's thinking about gendered roles or transform women's status within their families. This research will address this lack of knowledge by exploring these changing gendered

family roles within the context of a family literacy program and within the context of these social and economic changes.

The participants of this study will be drawn from two Even Start funded family literacy programs. Therefore, within the following section of this chapter I will describe and provide a general overview of the history, federal regulations, and components of the Even Start Family Literacy Program. Then, I will proceed to clarify the unique characteristics of the particular Even Start programs involved in this research project, *MAS* and *Superando*.

Even Start Family Literacy Programs

The federal government's Even Start Family Literacy program is the most renowned intergenerational family literacy program in the country (Wasik & Herrmann, 2004). The program was built directly from the Kenan Trust Family Literacy project, which was designed to bring together adult education programs and preschool programs in a coordinated effort. The goal of the Kenan project was to break the cycle of intergenerational illiteracy for low-income families (Darling & Hayes, 1989). The Kenan model identified four key program components: early childhood education, adult education, parenting support, and parent child time together (Wasik & Herrmann, 2004).

In 1988, the United States Congress passed Public Law 100-297 to authorize the Even Start Family Literacy program. The purpose of the program is to reach three interconnected goals: (1) to assist parents in becoming partners in their children's education, (2) to help children reach their full potential as learners, and (3) to provide adult education training for the parents (Brizius & Foster, 1993). Even Start offers a

comprehensive model designed to achieve these goals through the combination of adult education services and early childhood education opportunities for families with children from infancy to age seven.

The Even Start Family Literacy Program was originally authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as amended by the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988 (P. L. 100-297). Congress passed the National Literacy Act in 1991 (P. L. 102-73), which renamed Even Start as the Even Start Family Literacy Program and established the National Institute for Family Literacy (NIFL). Over the years, Even Start has experienced a number of changes and amendments, one of the most recent and important developments was the reauthorization of Even Start by the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, which has increased demands for programs to develop performance indicators and improve local programs (Wasik & Herrmann, 2004).

According to the legislation, the primary goal of Even Start is to break the cycle of poverty by "improving the educational opportunities for adults and children by integrating early childhood education and adult education into a unified program" (P. L. 100 – 297, §1051). In order to enroll in Even Start, a family must have an adult who is eligible for adult basic education services under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act or who is within the state's compulsory school attendance age range, and a child under eight years of age (U. S. Department of Education, 2002). Although federal regulations currently mandate that the four components identified by the Kenan family literacy model (early childhood education, adult education, parenting education, and parent-child literacy interactions) be included in any Even

Start program, the model for the delivery of services is left to be determined by the local program. This flexibility is consequential because it allows programs to provide the most appropriate services to families.

Even Start targets families that are "most in need" of services in the local community. Too often, this means that Even Start families have extremely poor literacy skills, live disordered lives characterized by multiple stressors and deep poverty, and have little hope of reaching economic self-sufficiency without intensive interventions such as Even Start (Richards, Merrill, Sano, Corson, Graham, & Weber, 2001). Each year approximately 50-60 percent of participants, for example, enter Oregon's Even Start programs at risk for clinical depression (Richards, Corson, Harrington, Merrill, & Pamulapati, 1999).

The majority of Even Start participants in the nation are women between the ages of 20 – 29 years (U. S. Department of Education, 1998). According to the Third National Even Start Evaluation Report, 84 percent of families had incomes at or significantly below the federal poverty level (U. S. Department of Education, 2003). The need for basic literacy skills for parents is also striking. Forty percent of new enrollees had a 9^{th} grade education or less before enrolling, and another 40 percent had reached $10\text{-}12^{th}$ grade but did not graduate.

Even Start is now serving more families with greater evidence of disadvantage. In particular, the proportion of Latino families in Even Start has more than doubled over the past 10 years (Tao, Gamse, & Tarr, 1998). The increases in the percentage of Latino families have led to increases in the proportion of non-native English speakers, who have different needs for adult literacy education (St. Pierre, Gamse, Alamprese,

Rimdzius, & Tao, 1998). Currently, in Oregon, two-thirds of program participants are English Language Learners.

This increase in the number of programs serving Latinos is a reflection of the broader demographic trends in the United States with the dramatic rise in Spanish speaking immigrants coming to this country. There is a substantial interest amongst recent immigrants in improving their English speaking and literacy (Strucker, Snow, & Pan, 2004). Clearly, Even Start programs have responded to this trend, as reflected in the dramatic increase of Latino participants. Beyond, the increased demand for family literacy services with the rise in Spanish speaking participants, welfare reform has also contributed to the dramatic increase in the percentage of Latinos in Even Start. The push for welfare recipients to join the workforce has limited the ability for lower income welfare mothers to participate in this time intensive program.

Unique Even Start Program

The Even Start family literacy programs in this study (*MAS* and *Superando*) take on issues of power and social justice through participatory education or empowerment education. The inclusion of an empowerment curriculum in family literacy and other social welfare programs is based on the assumption that it will further women's education levels, increase decision-making power within their homes and communities, led to greater levels of economic independence, and enhance well-being (Mayoux, 1997; Wrigley, 2004). The program's staff believes that if literacy is to make a difference in immigrant families' lives, individual literacy development must be linked to social action and community change. *MAS* and *Superando* utilize a model presented by Paolo Freire, who linked literacy teaching with community issues

(Freire & Macedo, 1987). In an interview with Cheryl and Ramona, program coordinators for *MAS* and *Superando*, they explained that Paolo Freire revolutionized adult education by introducing the idea that adult learners have a variety of lived experiences. Cheryl, one of the program coordinators, explained:

> One of the very basic interpretations of Freire is that when you are teaching adults language and literacy you are not teaching language and literacy to children. You are teaching language and literacy to people with a lot of knowledge, a lot of expertise, and a lot of experience. So, you don't do Dick and Jane with adult learners, because that's not what they need to know. His work was with very experienced, pre-literate people in the Amazon jungle who had extraordinary systems of agriculture and irrigation and so you bring all of these things into the language classroom and that's the content that we talk about....you don't bring in issues that aren't related to the learners. You talk about, for instance, how to be effective in a teacher-parent conference. How to work with the fact that they are turning off your electricity bill, language and literacy comes from that kind of content. And language and literacy as it develops within the person becomes more tools for the individual to affect change in their lives. So, it's not static...and as a result, what we find is that people learn a lot faster because we give people the tools that they actually need, so they learn it that much quicker.

Freire inspired participatory family literacy programs, similar to *Superando* and *MAS*, use issues in learners' lives to explore social realities and to develop literacy (Wrigley, 2004). Participatory programs also incorporate the concept of *transformative learning,* which suggests that individuals can be transformed through a process of critical reflection (Freire, 1973; Mezirow, 1990; Mezirow, 2000). Transformative learning posits that adult learners can experience *conscientization*, where the adults "achieve a deepening awareness of both the sociocultural reality which shapes their lives and... their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it" (Freire, 1973, pg. 7).

MAS and *Superando* apply a participatory approach by bringing the "value of service learning and civic literacy into the curriculum while balancing the course materials to reflect the values of individual rights and community responsibility, and the opportunity to confront ethical issues raised" (Mazer, 2004). For example, participants read literature written by Latina, women writers, such as Sandra Cisneros, Ana Griswold Del Castillo, and Esmeralda Santiago. These authors explore issues that reflect the participants' realities as women, immigrants, wives, and mothers. The books are used as a way to improve their Spanish literacy skills, while discussing key socio-cultural topics. For example, the women read Santiago's, *El Sueño de América*. Ramona, the program coordinator, explains how this book was used as a way for the women participants to experience *conscientization*,

> We're reading this novel in our morning reading… *Sueño de América.* America is the name of the main character; she's from Puerto Rico. And for years she's been taking this abuse from her husband, well he's not her husband he is the father of her daughter and he's married and has his own family, but anytime he wants to come and rape her or beat her he does it, and she's continually figuring out what to say and how to move and what to do, so he doesn't hurt her too badly. Yet, we get to the point in the book when all of sudden she's thinking, 'I'm stronger than he is. I don't deserve this why should I be changing everything I think and feel to make myself O.K. in front of him? I need to do something different.' And then she says, 'Oh my goodness am I becoming a feminist? One of those people?' I stopped, and I said, well what do you women think? Is being a feminist a bad thing?' And they all said, 'No!' And I am thinking, 'Oh my gosh,' because they would not have said that before, because they identified being a feminist with something negative.

The program also helps build participants' capacity to support their children's education by teaching them communication skills and how the school system works in the United States. Participants increase their capacity as leaders and advocates within the community as well. *Superando* offers a class on leadership and civic learning,

where the women as a group define a couple of issues that are vital in their lives, study those issues, and then they visit the legislature. One program year the women decided to focus on environmental issues. As a group they decided to learn how to make non-toxic household cleaning products. After learning all about this topic and creating the cleaning products, the women went to three social service programs in the community and presented what they had learned to other women similar to them. The participants also give presentations about family literacy at several different organizations and settings across the Portland-Metro area.

One of the most unique aspects of the program is the addition of a microenterprise component. The program offers participants skills in specific trades, such as sewing and wedding cake baking. The program also recently took over the local community's Farmer's Market, where women will learn invaluable skills, including how to run and manage a business.

These program components are highlighted, because they are fairly unique to Even Start services. Participatory programs, such as *MAS* and *Superando*, are rare (Wrigley, 2004). Very few programs are truly committed to participatory practices; however, there are quite a few programs that include learner-based teaching with a socio-cultural emphasis. Participatory programs are typically run by community-based organizations in which students and teachers share a common language, so that discussion and community concerns are possible (Auerbach, 2002; Rivera, 1999).

Contribution

Published studies on Latino families are limited, and therefore, our theoretical and empirical knowledge is deficient (Massey, Zambrana, Alonso, & Bell, 1995;

Umaña-Taylor & Bámanca, 2004). Unfortunately, with few exceptions, ethnic families are still compared to Anglo families ignoring socioeconomic variation. Furthermore, research on Latino families has not adequately documented *within* group variation in family structure and culture.

Mexican migration and acculturation is creating enormous changes that affect all aspects of women's lived experiences, including transforming gendered roles in the family (Arredondo et al., 2003). Massive immigration has important consequences for Latino families in the United States. This situation, however, is not unprecedented, and it represents the most current cycle in this country's history. This research addresses this lack of knowledge by exploring these changing gendered family roles within the context of a family literacy program as well as within the context of social and economic change. The purpose of this research is to understand the sociodemographic realities and lived experiences of these recent Mexican immigrants. Moreover, this research aids in understanding how ethnic families respond to changing social situations and cultural influences.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The selection of a qualitative research methodology was guided by my research questions, goals, and theory. Qualitative research approaches allow for an open, yet structured research method, where a great deal of information can be collected and then systematically explored (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Berg (1998) also described the uses of qualitative data and indicated that qualitative research refers to meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and the rich descriptions of things. The purpose of qualitative research is to illuminate the meaning or experiences (personal, sociocultural) through conversations and the interviewee's interpretation of life events and personal experiences.

As my intent is to gain a deeper understanding of the processes and ways in which family literacy programs can elicit transformative learning experiences in recent Mexican immigrant women, qualitative research methods lends itself well to my research. Further, given the limited research in this area, one of my primary research goals is to explore and identify possibilities for future research. Qualitative analysis has the ability to generate new hypotheses (Glazer & Strauss, 1967) and therefore is an appropriate methodology for exploratory research. The use of stories from participants also offers a broader view of the women's personal growth and transformations than a predetermined set of questions can, such as a survey.

In-depth qualitative interviews were also chosen because of three focus groups conducted with women participating in *MAS* and *Superando*. As a result of these focus groups I wanted to expand my understanding of certain issues raised during the focus

groups about the women's relationship changes with their husbands. More specifically, in each of the focus groups when asked, "What changes, if any have you made in your home?" conversations were incited around gender relations within their intimate relationships. This question was asked at the end of each focus group and due to time restrictions further exploration of the topic was cut short. I originally planned to use these focus group data for my dissertation research, however, the focus groups did not elicit as rich data as I anticipated.

This was unfortunate, because many of the women became very passionate talking about this subject. Some women described that their husbands created barriers to try to keep them from continuing participation in the program. One of the women was so animated when talking about this topic that she stood up, tightened her fist in a ball and began pumping her fist in the air, and turned towards the other women in the group and said, "We must figure out a way to stop this. We have the right to be here and better ourselves." The other women in the focus group all nodded their heads in agreement.

The focus group data primarily focused on program outcomes, such as literacy and parent education. The data on gender relations was not in-depth and merely scratched the surface about this topic. After reading through the focus group interviews a couple of times, I realized that I needed to go back and interview individual participants about these issues. Furthermore, the focus groups did not yield very rich data.

Focus groups were initially chosen because there is research to suggest that this methodology is particularly useful when working with Latino populations

(Umaña-Taylor & Bámanca, 2004). Umaña-Taylor & Bámanca (2004) describe focus groups as a practical and successful strategy for working with this population. The researchers highlight the many strengths associated with employing this methodology. In particular, they argue that they can be useful when a power differential exists between the researched and the researcher, because focus groups are conducted in a group setting the participants may share similar experiences, therefore they are more willing to share their feelings. Umaña-Taylor & Bámanca (2004) maintain that researchers can decrease some of the intimidation by treating the participants as the experts where the researcher is learning from them in a focus group setting. This is particularly significant when working with underrepresented groups such as Latinos (Morgan & Krueger, 1993).

Focus groups were also initially chosen for more practical reasons. Focus groups are an efficient technique of gathering information from a relatively large number of participants in a short amount of time (Berg, 1998; Morgan, 2002). Given that they take less time, they also typically require fewer resources than with other qualitative research methods. With focus groups there is also the potential to generate richer data through group interaction than individual interviews and are useful for obtaining in-depth information with a relatively new and understudied population (Berg, 1998; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Another key benefit to using focus groups or qualitative methods of any kind is that they are ideal for collecting data from individuals with low literacy levels (Morgan & Krueger, 1993; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

I, however, did not find that the focus groups stimulated conversation amongst the peers, nor did it generate in-depth information. Of course there are many factors that could have contributed to this poor outcome, but every effort was made to ensure that these focus groups were successful. In particular, I chose to use a highly skilled bi-lingual, bi-cultural researcher to facilitate the focus groups, which is recommended when doing focus groups with a Latino population. The failure of these focus groups to yield rich data is important to discuss because it is relevant to the methodological choices I have made for the current research project. The focus groups, as previously mentioned, incited many more questions than they answered for me. They did not serve the purpose that I originally intended, but did, however, lead to important insights that might have otherwise been overlooked.

Participants

Description of the Sample

The sample totaled 15 women enrolled in one of two family literacy programs, *MAS* (n = 7) and *Superando* (n = 8). All of the women were self-identified as recent immigrants from Mexico. The majority of the women (n = 12) were from extremely impoverished rural communities in central and southern Mexico with the exception of three women who were from large urban cities in Mexico. A map of Mexico indicating where participants originated from can be found in Appendix E. The three women that originated from urban settings described their neighborhoods as overcrowded and extremely poor. The average length of time in the United States was 4.7 years, ranging from one to seven years.

The ages of the women varied between 19 and 44 with an average age of 33 years. Most of the women were married, with the exception of one woman who was recently divorced from her husband. All participants had at least one child with a range of one to eight children. The average number of children reported by the women was 2.9. Their children's ages varied between 6 months and 14 years of age. Two of the women reported having adult children between the ages of 21 and 30 years of age.

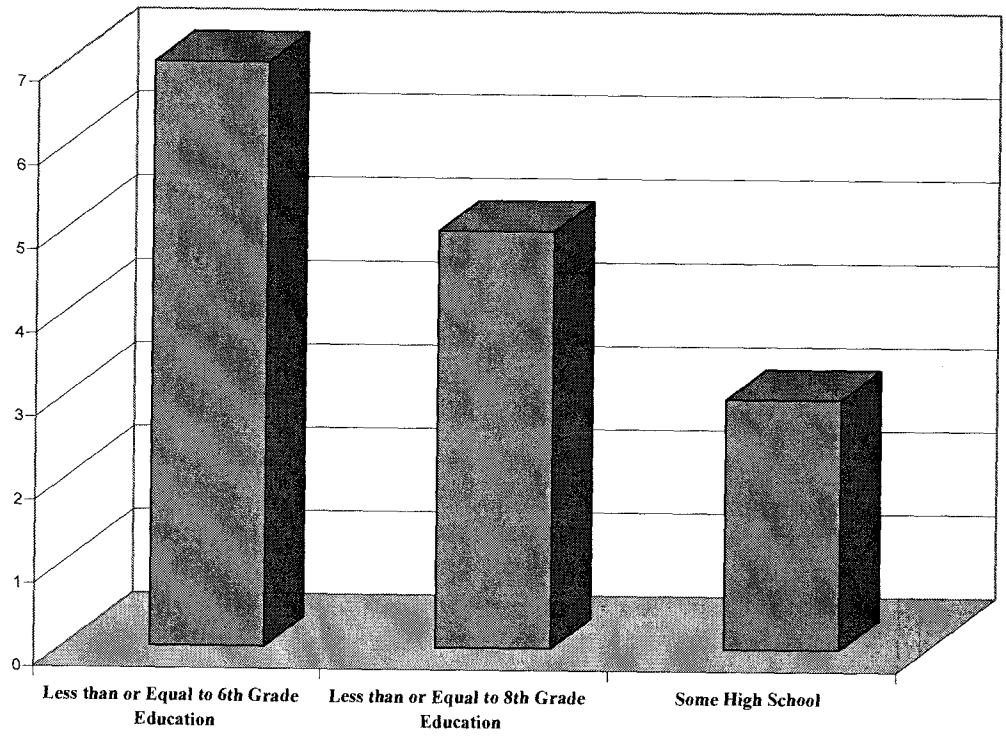
In order to qualify for the programs women were required to have income levels at or below 185% of the federal poverty guidelines. As a result, all of the women were low income with an average monthly income of $1,319.13, incomes ranged between $800 and $2,500 monthly. All but one of the families had incomes well below the federal poverty guidelines. The average household size was 4.5. Their family sizes were significantly smaller than the households they grew up in, where the average number of siblings was eight, with a range between five and nine siblings.

Another eligibility requirement for program participation in *MAS* and *Superando* is low literacy levels and English as a Second Language (ESL). All of the women in the sample had low to intermediate literacy skill levels. Of the women interviewed, six participants were unable to read or write when they entered the program. In addition, all of the women were native Spanish speakers, except for one participant whose native language was an indigenous dialect, but was also fluent in Spanish.

The average educational attainment of the women was 7.5 years (SD = 2.34). Close to half of the sample ($\underline{n} = 7$) had less than or equal to a sixth grade education, four of the women (33%) had less than or equal to an eighth grade education, and

three women had some high school education. Figure 3 illustrates the participant's education levels.

Figure 3. Participants' Education Levels



Close to half of the women worked in a variety of low wage jobs that were primarily paid under the table (n = 7), while, the remainder of participants were full time domestic workers. The majority of the women's husbands worked in construction or at nurseries or in a restaurant as bus boys. Table 3 presents demographic information about the participants and their families. The information includes pseudonyms, program, age, the region in México where they originated, length of program participation, number of children, husband's occupation and education level.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Name, Age, & Program	Time in Program (Months)	Region of Origin	Number of Children	Education Level	Employment	Husband's Occupation & Education Level
Araceli 33 *MAS*	6	Urban	2	8th grade	N/A	Bus Boy; 1st grade
Ariana 24 *Superando*	6	Rural	1	8th grade	N/A	Fieldworker; 2nd grade
Azucena 39 *MAS*	32	Rural	4	6th grade	Dishwasher	Factory worker; 8th grade
Carmela 19 *Superando*	8	Urban	1	6th grade	N/A	Construction; 8th
Christianne 40 *MAS*	6	Rural	2	12th grade	Fieldworker	Fieldworker; 3rd grade
Concepcion 33 *Superando*	9	Rural	5	5th grade	N/A	Fieldworker; 2nd
Ilia 36 *MAS*	13	Rural	3	8th grade	Child care	Fieldworker; 8th grade
Luz 33 *Superando*	9	Urban	1	12th grade	N/A	Construction; 10th grade
Margarita 32 *MAS*	15	Rural	3	8th grade	Child care	Construction; 8th grade
Maya 22 *Superando*	9	Urban	2	10th grade	Dishwasher	Teaching Aide; B.A.
Paloma 39 *Superando*	9	Rural	3	5th grade	N/A	Dishwasher; 8th grade
Regina 32 *MAS*	32	Rural	1	6th grade	Factory Worker	N/A

Table 1. Participant Characteristics (Cont.)

Name, Age, & Program	Time in Program (Months)	Region of Origin	Number of Children	Education Level	Employment	Husband's Occupation & Education Level
Soledad 33 *Superando*	6	Rural	4	7th grade	Shop cleaner	Field & Factory Worker; 8th grade
Thalia 36 *Superando*	11	Rural	8	6th grade	N/A	Field Worker; 6th grade
Veronica 44 *MAS*	32	Rural	3	6th grade	N/A	Field Worker; 6th grade

Recruitment

The sample for this study was drawn from two Even Start Family Literacy programs, *MAS* and *Superando*. A rich description of the programs and the services they provide can be found in Appendix C. A purposive sampling procedure (Patton, 1990) was used in identifying potential participants for this research project to ensure that 1) women who experienced conflict with their partners because of program participation are interviewed, and 2) only women who have participated in the program for at least six months will be included. Patton (1990) emphasized the value of this sampling strategy when seeking information-rich participants for qualitative studies.

The staff at the two program sites facilitated the recruitment of the participants for this study. I met with the two program coordinators, Cheryl and Ramona, and the parent educator, Lucía, to discuss the recruitment procedures a month prior to data collection. The program coordinators and I decided that it was best if they introduced

the research study to students during the parent education classes a couple of weeks before the interviews began. During this time the coordinators explained to the women the purpose of the study, the procedures, and the potential risks and benefits associated with participating in this research. The staff also explained that only women who have participated in the program for at least six months were eligible for the research project.

The staff also introduced me, described the work I do, and explained my relationship with the program. The endorsement of this research project by the program staff was critical to gaining access to the participants. Latinos tend to be a difficult-to-reach population and require a personal approach (Umaña-Taylor & Bámanca, 2004). Gaining the participants trust was crucial to the success of this research. Cheryl and Ramona were keenly aware of this, and spoke highly of me, assuring the women that I was in fact a trustworthy person.

When I met with the coordinators to discuss the recruitment process with the staff I emphasized the importance of being careful not to make the women feel as though they were required to participate in the study. Recent Latina immigrants are often very eager to please their teachers and likely did not want to disappoint them, or worse, might fear that they would lose program services if they decided not to participate. Therefore, I asked the staff to be conscientious of this and encouraged them to try and maintain a balance between encouraging the women to talk with me and not making them feel as though they would be judged poorly if they declined to participate.

Other than the initial introduction of the research project, the recruitment of individual participants varied by program, because of scheduling concerns and program coordinator preferences. Cheryl, the program coordinator for *MAS*, requested that interviews for this program site be conducted outside of the program's offered hours, because of the limited number of offered program hours (seven hours per week). She was adamant that the interviews did not interfere with the student's classroom time. Therefore, interviews were scheduled during the participant's free time, which did not present any challenges, as I anticipated.

No-shows are often a problem when conducting research projects, particularly with Latina immigrants (Umaña-Taylor & Bámanca, 2004). Latina women's cultural roles as mothers and wives often take precedence over any other commitment and can interfere with data collection (Madriz, 1998). I used several strategies to decrease the likelihood of cancellations and/or missed appointments. For example, I scheduled the interviews the week before the interviews and the reminded the women of their scheduled interview during the class just prior to their interview. Lucía, the parent educator, called them again on the day of the actual interview to ensure that they were still able to come. This strategy proved to be successful as we only encountered one no-show. This was due to an illness and we were able to re-schedule the interview.

MAS participants were invited by the parent educator to participate in the study on an individual basis after they heard the description of the project during their scheduled class time. If they agreed, an appointment for an interview was scheduled. The program staff mediated all communication and appointment scheduling with the participants. The interviews took place at *MAS's* program site on Monday evenings

when the program was not in session. Childcare was available and provided free of charge to further facilitate participation in the study. Participants were also provided with a $25 gift certificate at the outset of the interview as a small token of appreciation for their time.

The program coordinator for *Superando* preferred to have the interviews conducted during regular program hours. She identified all eligible participants and invited them to participate. If they agreed, they were excused from class for the duration of the interview. The interviews were conducted in an available classroom at the program site. The interviews took place on Tuesday mornings. Childcare was not an issue for these mothers, as their children participated in an on-site early childhood education program or were in elementary school during the time the interviews were conducted. These mothers also received a $25 gift certificate to a local grocery store as a "thank you" for participating.

Recruiting participants for the study was not difficult, particularly after the first interview was conducted. The first few participants interviewed shared with their classmates that it was a positive experience. The program coordinator related that one of the participants told her classmates that she was nervous about the interview at first, but was surprised when it turned out to be "like a relaxing afternoon chatting with close girlfriends." After that endorsement, I actually had to turn potential participants away, because I did not have enough resources to give everyone that wanted to participate gift certificates or pay for the translation and transcription of all of the interviews.

Interview Protocol

The interviews were semi-structured with several open-ended questions, and probes which were designed to elicit further responses from participants. Additional probes related to individual women's experiences were added as appropriate. The purpose of this interviewing style was to yield as much in-depth information as possible from the participants about their lived experiences and illicit rich descriptions of their daily lives. The questions in the interview protocol were related to the women's personal life experiences and their experiences in the family literacy program.

The interview protocol was translated by a bi-lingual, bi-cultural individual from the same region of México that the majority of participants originated from to ensure that the questions were understandable. Once the interviews were translated, they were reviewed by two additional native Spanish speakers. In addition, interview questions were worded so that they would be comprehensible at a sixth grade level and were pilot tested for clarity with two Latina women participating in a different family literacy program. Copies of the protocol in both Spanish and English are included in the Appendices.

Interview Procedures

Once the women arrived at the designated interview location, I used the first several minutes to build rapport and establish a level of comfort for the women. I offered food and beverages to the women and my research assistant and I shared personal information about our backgrounds, training, and interests. We also discussed the purpose and importance of the research.

After the initial introductions and ice breakers, we read the informed consent to each woman to reduce any potential discomfort that the participants might have had surrounding low literacy levels. In accordance to Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, the informed consent included a thorough description of the methods used to ensure confidentiality of the participants. In addition, each woman was informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that she could withdraw at any time or refuse to respond to any questions in which she was uncomfortable answering without any negative consequences.

We also asked each woman for permission to audiotape the interview and explained the reasons for doing so. The interviews were recorded in order to obtain the women's responses verbatim and allowed us to focus on the respondent's responses and non-verbal communication. All of the women agreed to participate and be audiotaped. Once the participants agreed and signed the informed consent document, they were given a $25 gift certificate to a local grocery store. The women were told that they were entitled to the gift certificate regardless of whether they completed the entire interview.

The interviews began by obtaining demographic information from each of the women. Once the demographic information was collected, the interview protocol was used as guide to obtain descriptions of the women's participation in *MAS* and *Superando* and explore how the program has influenced their thinking and behavior. Each woman was also asked to describe how they came to the United States and their general experiences with the immigration process. Further, questions were asked to elicit responses about their relationships with their husbands. Notes and general

impressions of the interview process were completed after each interview. The notes were used to enrich the data.

Analysis of the Data

The interviews were tape-recorded, translated, and transcribed verbatim. All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim in Spanish and then translated in English by a native Spanish speaker from the same country of origin as the women (Mexico) in order to minimize misinterpretation of expressions, idioms, and phrases. Another native Spanish speaker from Mexico listened to the tapes and corrected the transcriptions and translations for any words that have been misunderstood, misspelled, or not heard.

After the data was transcribed and translated, each interview was read three to four times for the identification of major themes prior to establishing an analysis framework for the data. Initial codes were developed using an open coding method to identify various themes and separate categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This coding scheme and their definitions can be found in Appendix D. The coded and separated data were then entered into MAXqda (Scolari, 2001), a qualitative software package designed to aid in the organization and analysis of the data. The use of MAXqda was particularly beneficial to my process of data reduction by allowing further organization of the data and the ability to examine only the desired coded segments of data.

Once all of the data was entered into MAXqda, I began my interpretation of the data based on transformative learning theory and previous research on these topics. Content analysis was used to identify the core meanings within the interviews (Patton,

2001). I noted similarities as well as individual differences and shaped key concepts into larger themes. This approach is consistent with the methodology described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Gilgun (1992).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This research focused on the stories of 15 Mexican women immigrants participating in *MAS* and *Superando*, two family literacy programs at the center of these women's sociocultural change. This research sought to understand the extent to which participation in these two programs empowers women to create change in their lives. The women in the study shared their stories of strength, resiliency, and finding personal power through literacy.

Findings from the analysis revealed that participation in these two family literacy programs fostered transformative learning in the lives of the women interviewed. They all related experiences that reflected the essential elements of transformative learning as originally outlined by Mezirow (1991). These essential elements helped guide this analysis:

1. Transformative learning begins with a disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, socio-cultural, or psychic assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168-169).

In addition, King's (2005) expansion of the theory through her extensive research and work with adult learners also guided this analysis. She concurs that Mezirow's (1991) phases are valid and critical aspects of transformative learning, but argues that they are not lockstep or rigid. She posits that we should envision the phases as an ascending spiral of experiences where individuals progressively experience, reflect, and understand new perspectives of their experiences and themselves. Further, she proposes that there is no targeted or preferred time-ordered schedule for transformative learning to take place as adults process their experiences at very different rates and from considerably different perspectives. In her words, "the emphasis of the transformative learning experience instead is on critically examining beliefs that have been previously unexamined and unquestioned. Transformative learning is an exploration and discovery of meaning-making for the individual" (p. 12).

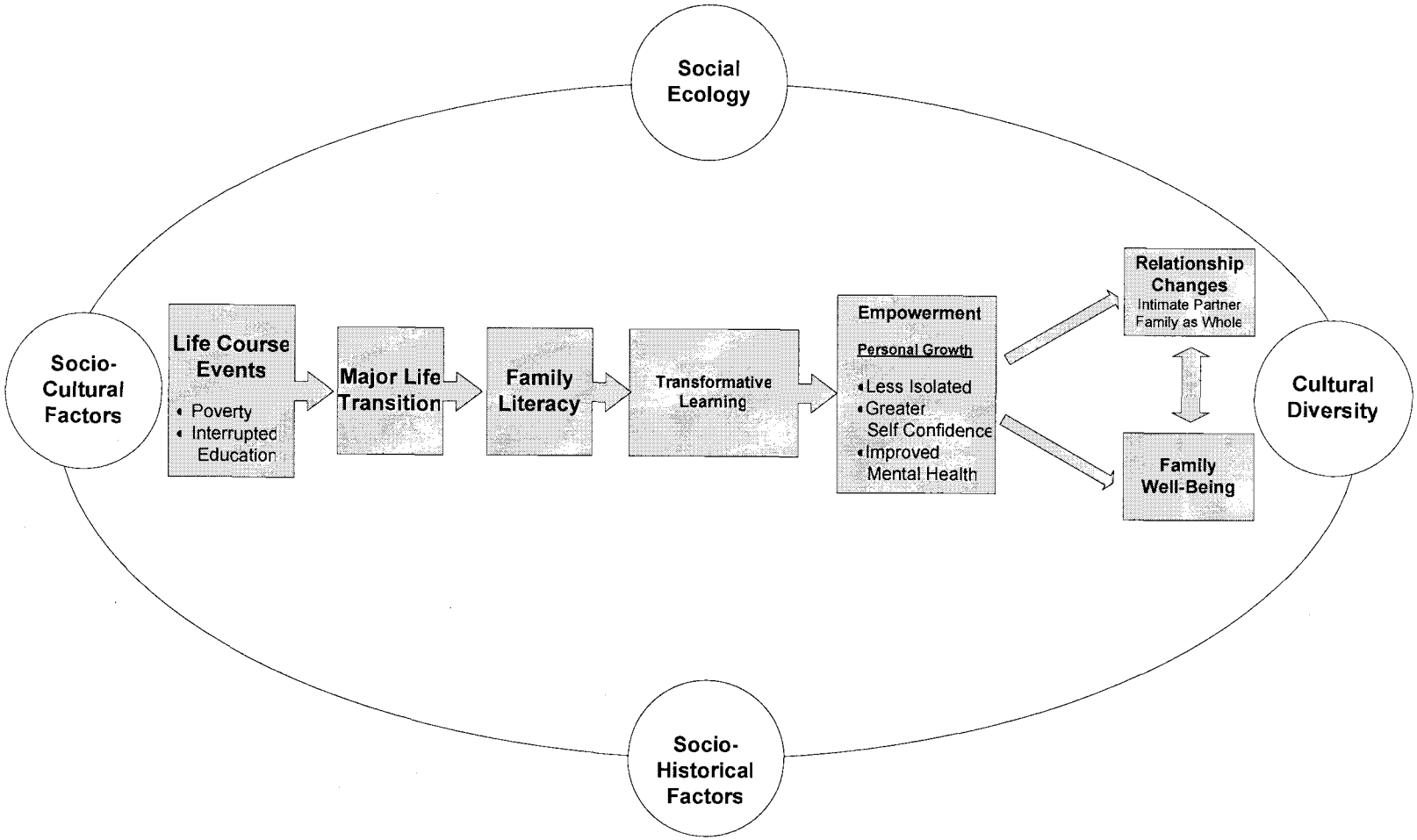
As I moved through the analysis process, my goal became to illustrate the ways in which *MAS* and *Superando* led to transformative learning experiences, which empowered the women in this study to change their lives. As a researcher I had difficulty knowing how best to organize and document their stories using transformative learning theory without losing the richness and diversity of the women's lives. I found as King (2005) observed, that the transformative learning experience did not occur in as rigid a fashion as presented by Mezirow (1991). The journey of transformative learning is dynamic. It certainly is not strictly linear, which

makes analyzing the transformative learning process complex. The women's retrospective accounts of their transformative learning, did however, clearly communicate the initial event that incited the transformations and the final outcome.

As a result, the presentation of findings begins with the first phase of transformative learning, a "disorienting dilemma" or significant life event that impelled the women to embark on creating these changes in their lives. I address the next several phases of transformative learning as they logically appeared in my data and end with the final stages of transformative learning, where the women explore new roles or actions, development of competence and self-confidence in their new roles, and reintegrate these new roles into their daily lives as a result of their new perspectives.

This can be seen in my research model (Figure 2), which served as a tool to help guide my data analysis. Before I began writing my analysis I developed this research model to aid in the organization of this chapter. The model demonstrates that the women's previous life course experiences, including a significant life event led the women to seek support in a family literacy program. Their program participation, in turn, was the vehicle for their personal transformative learning experiences. Once the women experienced perspective transformation, or personal transformations in self identity, a shift in the dynamics of their intimate partner relationships occurred. This relationship change also had a direct impact on their overall family well-being. The outermost circle in the research model represents the larger contextual factors that embody their transformative learning experiences.

Figure 2. Research Model



Major Life Transition

According to Mezirow (1995), transformative learning begins with a major life transition, crisis, or a "disorienting dilemma." This life course event can set into motion a series of life-altering changes in which the individual changes his/her "meaning schemes" (beliefs, attitudes, and emotional reactions). Ultimately, changes to their meaning schemes create changes in daily life. This occurs when the individual reintegrates these new perspectives into their daily living.

Immigration Experiences. All fifteen women in this study described their personal stories of transformative learning. Their journeys towards transformative learning and empowerment began with the major life transition of immigrating to the United States. Their adjustment to a new culture, language, and literacy challenged these women to rise above their perceived limitations, pain, and isolation.

The immigration experience and adjustment to the United States was overwhelmingly stressful and painful for 13 of the 15 (86%) participants. Participants reported experiencing stressors associated with immigrating to the United States, including economic instability, made worse by the extremely high cost of living, low-wage work, lack of English literacy and limited Spanish literacy, discrimination, strained family relationships, feelings of isolation, and depression. Leaving behind the life they knew, and in particular, their loved ones was another cause for enormous stress. Paloma described her experience of this painful process in detail:

> I have been here six years and unfortunately, it was a bad experience coming here, leaving my family and then meeting new people, and getting used to a new way of living. It was very painful for me to leave my parents; I was the only daughter they had. It was very painful for me to leave all my things; I had a lot of plants and getting rid of them was very sad. Then when I first came here, my husband worked in a

> restaurant and then they fired him and we had to move in with a sister, because we didn't have any money. But we didn't get along very well, because my brother-in-law is American and they didn't understand us and we had to leave.

Many of the women related similar distressing experiences of leaving family and personal items behind that were meaningful to them. Moreover, three-quarters of the women, like Paloma, reported that they chose the area they moved to because they already had family living there. Over half of these women, however, found that their relationships with relatives quickly became strained by the multiple stressors associated with cultural adaptation. Ariana described how life in the United States not only did not meet her expectations, but that economic stressors also destroyed her relationship with her in-laws upon her move to the United States:

I: How did you imagine life would be before you came here?

A: I imagined it would be good. I didn't know how it was here.

I: Now that you're here, how is it different than what you had imagined?

A: I thought that I would be able to get out more, and do more things, but now that I'm here, I realize I can't get out that much. The lives of people here in comparison to México feel really separate. In México everyone is out in the streets, you know your neighbors, you meet people very easily. Here everyone is just in their separate houses and no one talks to you. And I have family here but we don't even talk. They are far away and I never see them.

I: Your husband has family here?

A: Yes.

I: And you don't get together with them?

A: No.

I: Why not?

> A: It's just that sometimes living together brings out problems. When we first came here we had to live together, because my husband was looking for work and rent is very high here. So, we lived together with his family, but it did not go very well. They say that I control my husband. That what he helps me with is because I make him do it. They also accused him of not helping out with money so much and blamed me for it. So it's better to have some space from them.

All of the women that experienced poor relationships with extended family cited economic stressors at the root of the problems. These familial problems contributed to the women's feelings of isolation and depression. Concepcion shared a powerful example of these feelings:

> It was very hard for me to get used to life here in the United States. When I first came to live here we lived with my husband's brother, he only had one daughter and had four sons. We have five sons, so there were fourteen of us living in a very small house, because we could not afford anything else. So, for me it was hard to live with them for three months. I would not adapt when I first came to the United States, I saw everything gray. I did not see anything in color. Perhaps I was going through a transition, a change. I told my mom it was all ugly here. I felt trapped; I felt I did not have the liberty to make decisions. Not me or my children, because I was not in my own home. Nothing was mine. When I found an apartment, things were much easier, but I still spent a year stuck in my apartment without talking to anyone. Not even our relatives, after living together we had had enough. My life was just get up, eat, do chores, watch television, and take the children to school. It was a boring and meaningless routine.

Roschelle's (1997) research on extended kin networks in racially and ethnically diverse families observed similar findings. She indicated that foreign born immigrants were less likely to participate in both extended kin and non-kin social support networks. These findings were contradictory to previous studies, which emphasized the positive aspects of minority life arguing that ethnic minorities, including Latinos, are more likely to participate in extended social support networks. This line of research Rochelle (1997) argued may be detrimental to ethnic minorities,

because it ignores the challenges and pervasive problems experienced by low-income ethnic minority families in the United States. Her results demonstrated that immigrants from Mexico were the most in need of assistance, because they were unable to develop extensive social support networks. My research findings provide further evidence of the enormous struggles that recent Mexican immigrants face. Both kin and non-kin social support networks were nonexistent for the majority of women I interviewed.

Isolation, Depression, and Fear. All but one of the participants described feeling isolated when they first came to the United States. Christianne was one of the majority that experienced feeling isolated. She shared, "When I first came I felt so frustrated and bored. I did not know anyone. I could not go anywhere or do anything." Luz related similar sentiments, "I felt bored, confused, stressed, and more than anything confined to the four walls of my apartment. I was trapped here." Margarita also poignantly stated:

> Yes, I was very depressed when I came and you don't know how to get out of that depression, being far away from all the family, and for me knowing that my mom was sick made it very hard. And I could not go back, there was no way I could go home, because I had just gotten here and they charge a lot, it was $3000 to come with my children. And I could not go; we still had not even paid for it yet. And that is what made me fall into the worst depression. I thought how did I get myself into this, what was I thinking? We were here all alone, with nothing, not even clothes, and we had to live in this horrible camp, but soon after working hard in the fields we were able to leave there, thank God, but yes, I was alone and so very depressed you cannot even imagine.

The one participant who did not experience feelings of isolation, Araceli, was able to maintain a close relationship with her sister, despite the fact that they lived together. She was also one of the only two participants in the study who personally

made the decision to come to the United States. She encouraged her husband to come, because she wanted to be closer to her sister and be able to financially help her parents. All of the other women came because their husbands wanted to come find work. Of those, all but two of the husbands chose to move to an area in the country where they already had family. This may have contributed to the women's unhappiness and family relationship difficulties as it can be easier to cope with one's own family than with a family by marriage.

Although Araceli did not report feeling isolated, she did indicate that she experienced a great deal of depression:

> I would just cry and cry everyday. My husband would come home from work and I would just be sobbing. I felt like my life was without purpose. Everyday it's just the same. I felt trapped in the house, because my sister and husband and everybody was out working and because of my health problems I can't work in a physical job and when you don't speak English there really isn't much. I was just confined to the house and only watched *Telenovelas* all day. I missed my mother and father so much, too. That's what really makes me depressed is when I think of my poor parents alone with all their children here in the United States. We are all here for them, because they are very sick and they take very expensive medications. That is what we are all here for, to provide for our sick parents. All of this made me tell my husband that I wanted to go back to México, but he said to me 'No, *mi amor* (my love), have patience.'

Araceli noted in the above quote that without the ability to speak English, her job opportunities were extremely limited. The women's limited English contributed greatly to their feelings of depression and isolation; one mother said, "Coming here was nothing I expected; it was like I came to the U. S. just to be locked up at home. I couldn't go out for fear of someone talking English to me."

A few women spoke about how fearful they had felt. For example, Concepcion related, "If a person knocked on my door I was afraid. In the stores I was always

afraid. It was because I could not defend myself or express myself, because I did not know English." Along these same lines, Ilia told the following story:

> Ilia: I used to try and go out on my own, but was so afraid that soon I never left my house. I was afraid to ride the bus, because I did not know where anything was or how to know how much to pay, or what to do when I wanted to get off the bus and I didn't know my way around, either. I was so afraid when people would talk to me in English. One time I went to the grocery store and collected all of the things I needed, but when I went to buy my things the lady kept talking at me in English and I didn't understand what she was saying. She kept talking louder and louder and I felt so ashamed. I was so embarrassed that I just dropped all my things there at the counter and ran out of the store and never went back again.
>
> I: How did you get your groceries then?
>
> Ilia: First, I made my husband go to get everything, but soon he got tired of always having to do this and he works so much. We eventually found stores that all the Mexicans go to that have the Mexican products and the people speak Spanish, but the problem is that they do not always have what we need and sometimes it can be more expensive. I still did not like it very much, because I was scared to go out of the house. I never wanted to face anyone speaking to me in English.

Analogous to Delgado-Gaitan's (2001) ethnographic study of recent Mexican immigrants, these findings demonstrate how the socio-cultural dislocations experienced by the women silenced them. As Delgado-Gaitan (2001) poignantly observed, "these families lived with a gag over their mouths because of shame and isolation resulting from poverty and lack of education" (pg. 53). As other scholars have observed, the women in my study had little personal power in their lives (Anderson, 1996; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Kardam, 2003; Pesquera, 1984, 1994). Similar to the families in Delgado-Gaitain's (2001) study, the dramatic transition of

cultural adjustment pushed the women in my study to create change in their lives and transcend their pain, isolation, and feelings of hopelessness.

Seeking Support. All of the women realized they needed support to find a way out of their distressing life circumstances. Committing to the family literacy programs represented another significant life transition for the women. Not knowing how to speak the dominant language of the new culture in which they now resided was the most apparent source of stress for the participants. Therefore, most of the participants (12 of the 15) were attracted to *MAS* and *Superando* to learn English. Although the majority of the women were initially inspired to attend the program to further their English skills, the reasons why they remained in the program, however, were more varied and complex. Concepcion, for example, provided an example of how her reasons for participating in the program evolved after participating in the program:

> I am motivated to continue with the program because of my dreams and hopes for myself and my family. When I first started the program my dreams were only to learn English; with that dream I came to the program. But now being here and getting to know the program and all the classes that are offered, and all the help that is offered, I started to consider getting my GED. Later after being in the program I started to take the GED classes, and I discovered that I could only speak Spanish, but not write it. It's important to learn English but also your own language. I still have the dream of getting my GED, of learning English, and above all that to continue with the changes I see in myself. I used to be so quiet and never want to talk. It's like I am a different person now. The program has opened my eyes to so many different possibilities. I come here to keep advancing myself.

Likewise, Veronica stated:

> First, I came to the program to learn English, but now English is like 50 and 50, because the Personal Growth classes we have on Wednesdays have helped me so much. They help us learn how to talk to our children about sex, how to detect cancer. Many people from Mexico are very shy when it comes to these things. We are

> embarrassed to get a pap-smear, which I learned is very important. And here they tell us not to be afraid. And this is all very important so it is like 50 – 50. The English is still important, but so are all the other things we learn here.

As they became more self-aware, the women soon developed secondary goals and interests that they never knew were possible or even relevant. The programs helped elicit more than a change in specific knowledge or skills for these women. More specifically, the two programs opened the door for the women to engage in learning English, which was essential to their survival in their new world, while also providing the opportunity for developmental changes in self-awareness and understanding to occur. Instead, a new framework for understanding their lives emerged as a result of program participation, which is at the core of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991).

Changing goals. Some women also cited other reasons for program participation. These reasons provide context for their transformative learning. For example, Regina came to the program at a point in her life when she wanted to end the cycle of abuse in her life. She related:

> In my family there is domestic violence and I was told that this is one of the themes that is spoken about here. And that was when I decided that is something that I wanted to learn about when I entered. I came [here] because I wanted to learn how to live without violence.

Three other parents realized that they were working just to pay for child care. Once, they made this realization, they decided to make a change in their life and join the program. Carmela provided an example of this:

> Two years ago I was working in a fruit processing plant and a co-worker told me that I was going to end up paying more money for having my children babysat. I asked her 'where will I study?' And she

> told me she was going to give me the phone number so that I could come over here.

Another parent expressed similar concerns:

> I decided to start the program because all my children are young of age and need a lot of care. And the best qualified person for taking care of my children is myself. And with a job that pays minimum wage I was paying over half of my salary sending three children to childcare. I decided it's not the best moment for me to work and when I discovered the services this program offers I thought it better if I go and study.

Finally, another mother shared that she came to the program so that she could help her children succeed in school, one of the most important goals of family literacy programs. Patricia poignantly related:

> I want to be able to help my children with their homework. It's very sad when your children ask you for help and you can't. That's what motivates me.

Through program participation the women were venturing forth from the familiar to pursue a new way of thinking and forge new pathways for themselves.

The essential elements of transformative learning include critical reflection, dialogue, and questioning beliefs, values, and assumptions (Mezirow, 1991). This questioning is what leads to dramatic changes in the women's lives as they explore new ways of understanding and reach for new possibilities. This questioning is embedded in experience, either personal experience that sets the scene for immediate learning as illustrated by the quotes above, or past experience that is brought out into the open for personal and shared examination (King, 2005).

Previous Educational Experiences. One of the key themes that emerged from the data is the women's previous educational experiences. Their exploration of their educational history is the beginning and ending of their transformative learning in

many senses. Their new understanding of themselves emerged from these experiences and ultimately was the key driving force behind their transformative learning.

When asked about their childhoods, all but two of the participants addressed issues related to poverty and education. Childhood poverty and educational attainment were strongly intertwined. Verónica, who was only able to study until the eighth grade, shared the following account about her childhood:

> In one way it was happy and in the other it was very sad. My parents had many children and they could not put us all through school. So I did not have the opportunity to go to school, because we were poor I could not go to school. I only completed elementary school. If it had been up to me I would have continued studying, but my dad said 'no.' He said women did not need to study, that we would end up getting married, so why did we need to study? So, it was something that was very difficult for me because I wanted to continue studying.

Verónica went on to say that she had to fight to go as far as she did in school, because her father actually wanted her to quit sooner. She continued:

> Yeah, in my town we only had up to elementary school and if you wanted to study more you had to go to the next town…and it was expensive to pay the bus and all that is required, so I had to fight with my dad to go. He finally gave in and let me, but it was not easy. I don't blame my dad for thinking this way now, because he only ever worked in the field and I have to respect him because he is my father.

Discussing their childhood and lack of educational opportunities proved to be the most painful part of the interview process for the women. All but three of the women became very emotional when talking about their past. Many broke down and cried, and subsequently were embarrassed by their tears. It seemed as if the tears took them by surprise. One mother shared:

> The hardest thing for me was not having the opportunity to study. I remember that my mother would not let us go to school any longer

> when I was 12 years old. Because she told me I was already too old. She told me it was no longer right for me to go to school because I was too big. In my community there was only an elementary school, and I didn't even have the opportunity to finish elementary school.

Not being able to continue in school was profoundly painful for the majority of the participants. Interrupted educations were an example for the women of how their childhoods were robbed from them. As one participant succinctly stated:

> What childhood? My life is exactly the same now as then, it's just work, work, and more work. It's all the same. All work and nothing else. See in México, it's a choice between going to school or eating, not both, and food is going to win every time.

Concepcion, who had to leave school when she was in the fifth grade also provided a good example of this when she related:

> Well for us in Mexico, childhood, for me especially, you don't have a childhood that you can remember, where you played or went out in the streets. For me, from eight years old it was working in the field, helping my dad and also helping my mom with the household chores. They had always raised animals, cows and pigs, and they also had to do hard labor. So for me it wasn't a normal childhood, for me there was no playing, or going to parties or anything like that.

For Soledad, who was abused as a child, having to leave school was difficult, as school was her escape from abuse. When describing her childhood she displayed a profound mix of emotion:

> Oh, to me my homeland is very beautiful, something that makes me sigh when I remember, well there are many things. We were very poor, I think this is the government's fault, because if they managed things the way they do here things would be different. There is so much corruption in our government. It is sad to say because I am Mexican, but this is a truth that we cannot hide. My experience, my parents did not have any education, my mom would hit us a lot. We had horses, and the most beautiful thing that I remember was that I got to ride horses. And if my mom hit me I would get on a horse and leave. It was like running away from all those things but it was nice. School I also remember with much fondness, because it was also a place that I escaped to. Getting to school was like forgetting all the

> things that were at home, that there were problems, and that there was physical abuse. When I had to stop going to school to work and help support the family it was as if my life was over. I just could have died.

Interrupted education was directly linked to poverty, which was compounded by the lack of free public education in Mexico. As Araceli described:

> Well in Mexico you need to buy notebooks for each subject, for Spanish, Math, Natural and Social Science, one uniform and also another for PE. And for a poor person that is a lot, and this happens every year. Because you have to buy the uniform and shoes, and I am talking about a person that works in the fields, and sometimes they just earn enough to put beans and tortillas on the table. Over there nothing is free, you even have to buy school supplies. Over here if you are in need they give the kids free lunch. Over there you have to send lunch. It is very different; there is so much money that you spend. One, just one student you spend like $1000 pesos in just the supplies and two uniforms. For a person that is earning two hundred a week this is impossible and very sad. And I am talking to you about an elementary school. When you enter middle school it is a little more. In the high school it is even more because you pay by quarter. And to go to College forget it.

Valdés (1996) also reported similar findings in her ethnography of Mexican immigrant families and their children's educational experiences. The participants in her study were also sensitive about their lack of formal education. She writes, "I do not know if it was particularly [sensitive] because I, in my role as *maestra* [teacher], was raising the issue or if the sensitivity was due to a general sense that it was important to have gone to school." (p. 149). I, too, have contemplated this same question; however, my inquiry was related to my role as program evaluator, not educator. Participants in Delgado-Gaitan's (2001) also reported interrupted educations and this became their inspiration for advocating for educational reform for their own children in hopes that their children would have more opportunities than they had. The participants in my study shared these same hopes and dreams. Their children were

their inspiration for continuing with their educations and staying in the United States, despite the struggles they faced.

The women's stories not only paint a picture of painful childhood experiences, but also demonstrate critical self-reflection and an understanding of structural factors related to poverty, critical elements related to transformative learning (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Feire, 1970; King, 2005). Transformative learning illuminates one's understanding of oneself in the context of her world (King, 2004; O'Sullivan, Morell, & O'Connor, 2002; Taylor, 1998). The women's childhood recollections are illustrative of critical questioning, which emerged from their own experiences.

MAS and *Superando* provided learning experiences that facilitated transformative learning by engaging the women in active discussions about politics, history, and contemporary events relevant to the women's lives, and by exploring the women's perspectives and understanding. This was particularly evident in Soledad's account of her childhood as she critically reflected and sought answers to understanding her social location and painful childhood experiences.

These profound experiences were the driving force behind transformative learning in the women's lives. Their strong desire to become educated, because of their inability to pursue education in their youth, provided the context in which the door to transformative learning was opened.

Inner Transformations. The participants described numerous inner transformations, which they ascribed to their participation in *MAS* and *Superando*. The women's educational experiences in *MAS* and *Superando* extended far beyond academic achievement to include developmental changes, such as increased self-

awareness, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Changes related to a woman's inner being and psychological sense of self are the focus of transformative learning. These powerful accounts of inner transformations generated the most prolific responses from the participants.

MAS and *Superando* utilized many teaching strategies that facilitated transformative learning opportunities for the women. One of the goals of the program, for example, is to teach students to critically question and analyze information. The programs established two collaborative inquiry groups, the Civic learning group and a Leadership group. These groups were designed to guide the women's learning with advanced vocabulary, historical and cultural knowledge, research strategies, public speaking opportunities, and critical questioning with the goal of gaining English language acquisition through the three major avenues of reading, listening, and speaking. During the interviews, many of the women in the study said that they really enjoyed participating in these groups. When asked what she liked best about the program one mother demonstrated how the programs teach much more than isolated language skills:

> It helps us in a personal way. It's not always about focusing on the subject, even though it's important for us to learn the language, being that we are immigrants, but it's also about learning about ourselves. The self-esteem classes have really helped me. We also get leadership classes, these are important to us so that we do not allow our husbands to push us around, and so that we know our rights as women.

This is consistent with King's (2002, 2004, 2005) research on transformative learning with Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) populations. She found that the transformations of ESL and ABE adult learners are far reaching. Specifically, she documented the cultural and personal transformations of

these learners and found evidence to support the transformative learning theory. Participants in her studies related foundational changes in behavior and perspective as the learners became more accepting of people from other cultures.

Increasing Awareness. The inner transformations cited by the women were most significantly linked to learning about social issues, including women's rights and basic human rights. Learning about these social issues was also related to the third and fourth phases of the transformative learning process: A critical assessment of epistemic, socio-cultural, or psychic assumptions, and the recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have experienced similar change (Mezirow, 1991).

Learning how to view the world in different ways or learning about social issues can aid in participants developing new ways of coping with change, experiencing life long learning, understanding things from other students' perspectives, and creating new understandings of their worlds. For these women, learning about their rights as women was powerful and affirming. Paloma shared:

> P: Yes, here I am starting to awaken more, to know more, to know my rights as a woman. All the materials are very interesting and I'm learning so much.
>
> I: You say that you are learning about the rights of women. What things are you learning and what do you think about that?
>
> P: For example, make our voice heard, and that it's not good that husbands hit their wives.
>
> I: And what do you think about the things you've learned?
>
> P: Well, it's very sad what happens to women, things that shouldn't have happened. It's not good. As women we have the right to be respected and to be treated with respect. We all have rights and that neither the man nor the woman is better, not one or the other.

> It's like before I was very dumb I didn't know anything. I remember that I didn't really ask things and they didn't tell me much either. I remember when I was older and I had my period and I didn't know. Through a cousin was how I found out everything that happens in a woman. But my mom didn't tell me anything. Partly that was the fault of my parents, but partly my fault. Here, I am learning all of the things I should have learned when I was younger.

Learning about human rights and women's rights in particular, was a powerful experience for the women. Two-thirds of women mentioned something related to learning about the rights of women; this topic was new to them and was clearly validating. For instance, Margarita stated:

> I really like it because we come from a culture where women are looked down on, or looked at as incapable. It is thought that women are good only for keeping the house. And here they bring us people that talk to us about things such as domestic abuse; they talk to us about different themes that lift our self-esteem. And now we know that as women we are valuable and that we can do anything we want to; that we are just as capable of doing things as men are. For example, when I started the program I did not drive, my husband didn't want me to and I did not know that I could drive. Lucía [parent educator and home visitor] helped me with this goal and I got my license and now I drive.

The following statements are representative of typical responses provided by women in the program when asked how the program has changed their thinking:

> That not just because I am a woman I have to stay at home all the time. That we have the same rights as men do. And that we can make these rights valid even if we are women.

> I learned that as a person I am worth a lot, that I am not lower than anyone else, that we are all equal. And that because I am a woman this does not mean that I can't do the same things that a man does, like better myself and get an education.

These responses demonstrate an increased awareness about gender-based discrimination. One of the most empowering outcomes for the women was the understanding that their problems were greater than them and that gender

discrimination is based in specific social, cultural, and historical contexts (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Kardam, 2003; Osmond & Thorne, 1993). More importantly, they realized that because gendered family roles and discrimination are socially constructed (Arredondo, Hurtado, Klahn, Nájera-Ramírez, & Zavella, 2003; Kardam, 2003; Osmond & Thorne, 1993) they are also changeable.

A program evaluation that focused on teaching women in Turkey about gender discrimination and women's rights also empowered women in similar ways (Kardam, 2003). Women in the human right's training program became more self-confident as a result of program participation. The evaluation results differed from my findings, however, in the sense that some participants reported that they would have preferred not knowing about their human rights. Not all women reported feeling more self-confident and some indicated that they actually became more depressed, because they felt helpless to change their situations. This was something that I expected to see in my study, but did not, the "ignorance is bliss" phenomenon was not present within my data.

Social Support and Personal Validation. The women also reported feeling relieved and affirmed that other women shared similar experiences. An example of this was provided by Luz, when she stated:

> We are all women and we are united. We all are Latinas and we have to stand together. I have learned this in the program. When I came here I was so alone and now I am here with all of us struggling together to make a difference for ourselves, for our children. We all come from similar backgrounds and experiences and it is really nice to know that I am not the only one with these struggles. I don't feel so alone coming here. It's like we are a family.

Another mother shared, "I was so happy when I came here and could meet other women experiencing the same troubles as me. I don't feel so alone anymore." These findings represent two important phases in the process of transformative learning. For one, the realization that they are not alone, that others share similar beliefs as them, and have negotiated similar life changes is critical to their inner transformations (Mezirow, 1991). Further, through learning different ways to examine gendered family roles the women were actively engaged in critically assessing their assumptions about their socio-cultural orientations as well as their identities as women.

It was clear that they had received the message that women are secondary or inferior to men. This was evidenced by numerous comments related to fathers and husbands communicating to the women that their opportunities and sometimes even their capabilities were limited by the fact that they were women. As Carmela said, "well my father told me that as a woman all there is to be is a wife and a mother." Further, as their identities were so strongly linked to their familial roles, of wife and mother, they did not think of themselves as individuals with their own interests and needs. Their self-care was not a priority, as Maya's remarks illustrate:

> I never knew that I liked to learn and read books until I came here. The program has opened my eyes to so many things. I am learning that I am a person with needs and likes and interests. It was like I was dead before, a ghost. I did everything only for my family. I was just living day to day without thinking, but now I am excited to get up and come here to learn all the new things we are learning here. I even learned that I really like math, something else I never knew!

Concepcion added:

> Before I started the program I would not think about myself. My life was dedicated to my children and home. Now I think that I am me, and I can do things for myself while doing things for my children as well. The program has helped me to see that when I do things for me I also

am helping my children, because I can be a better mom when I give that time and energy to myself I have more to give to them.

Not focusing on their individual needs was likely cultural, as Mexicans place a high value on preserving strong family connections (Hurtado, 1995; Marín & Marín, 1991; Solis, 1995). A number of studies have documented the importance of the family for Latinos, and apply the term familism to describe the priority that family holds for them in their lives (Angel & Tienda, 1982; Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Marín & Marín, 1991; Zambrana, 1995). Further, it refers to the expectation that family will be the center of support and individual family members will place interpersonal relationships with family over individual achievements (Marín & Marín, 1991). This expectation can lead women to give up their own priorities and interests for the greater good of the family (Anderson, 1996; Kardan, 2003). The following excerpt from Maya's interview is representative of this concept:

I: Think back to how your life was before you started the program. In what ways have you changed since you began participating in *Superando*?

M: I think I was more stressed out; I was just at home getting very stressed out. I would just be there thinking of how we needed to pay bills, that I needed to do the chores, and take care of the children and my husband. I was very depressed.

I: And now that you started the program?

M: Not any more, I feel freer and like I can do many things. I learned that my life does not have to be only about taking care of my husband and children.

I: What are the most important ways that the program *Superando* has affected or helped you personally?

M: It has helped me in the ways that I have been sharing with you that I have learned what I am capable of doing and that I can keep

> studying. I have learned that I have more options than just sitting at home all the time.

Through participating in *MAS* and *Superando* they learned about their rights as women and as a result realized that they are individuals in their own right. Consequently, they were excited to explore the options for these new roles, which is also representative of the fifth key phase in the transformative learning process (Mezirow, 1991).

Greater Self-Esteem and Self Confidence. Learning about gender-based discrimination and human rights was empowering for the majority of the women and ultimately led to powerful inner transformations. Learning that they were not alone, that they had more opportunities than formerly believed, and that their status as women and Latinas did not have to limit them was a validating experience.

Quotes related to learning about these issues were often entwined with comments related to their self-esteem and self-confidence. For instance, Carmela related:

> It is so helpful, it helps you to be a more liberal person, so you won't be scared of going out and not knowing what to do. Here they help you learn so many things, women's rights, the environment, it helps us to learn, to understand where we are from and where we can go from here, to keep moving forward and put all your effort into the things you do.

> My goal is to get my GED, so that I can work in the little school, Head Start. I want to do that, I want to continue coming because that helps us succeed, like I told you, to keep going forward, and have a better understanding of myself and others. Before I was a person who thought very little of myself. This program has helped me so much to make me realize that I can do whatever I set my mind to.

Other women in the program did not directly attribute their higher self-esteem to learning about women's rights; rather, they related increased feelings of self-worth to

program participation in general. An example of this is evidenced by the subsequent sequence from Thalia's interview:

> I: How would you describe yourself before coming to the program?
>
> T: I would describe myself like a person with a very low self-esteem; I was living just to live, without any hope.
>
> I: How would you describe yourself now?
>
> T: Now I feel like a person with a very high self-esteem. I get up very happy and content, I get up thinking that I have many goals and a better future.
>
> I: When you say a better future what do you mean?
>
> T: Well, with the simple fact of having a higher self-esteem I think I have more possibilities of doing things, like going out and getting a job that I like or opening my own business.

Similarly, when asked, "What were the most important ways in which the program has helped you personally?" Azucena replied:

> The program has given me hope for a better future. I now have the confidence to look for a better job and live much better. Before I lived without hope for a better future.

Ilia shared an important personal transformation along these lines as well:

> Well before I came to the program, criticism really hurt me, if people said things or criticized me before it made me cry, but not now. Now it doesn't hurt me. I have more self esteem.

Another remarkable finding was that over half of the women said that they emerged from their shells to become more self-confident as a result of program participation. Participants reported transitioning from being shy and timid to more self-assured, open, and expressive. Verónica demonstrated this when she shared:

> Before coming [to the program] I felt very shy and very timid. I was embarrassed to talk to anyone. But this has changed and I have made

many friendships. I used to not know many people, and here there are many different people to meet.

Paloma also related:

P: When I first started the program I was much too shy to talk to anyone. The only time I would talk was to Lucía [parent educator and home visitor] in private. In class I used to hide so I wouldn't have to talk.

I: Would you have talked with us before?

P: Oh no! Never. I would have been much too timid to talk with you before. I never would have done this interview.

Many of the women shared similar sentiments when asked whether they would have spoken to us before attending the program. Carmela also responded correspondingly:

C: The way that it has helped me is in my way of thinking. Before the only thing that I wanted to do was come to this country to work, learn English, and work more than anything. And the program has helped me so much.

I: When you said you were ignorant, what did you mean? Can you explain to me a little more?

C: When I first got here I was scared of everything. I was scared even of talking to people. I would just keep my comments to myself.

I: In English?

C: In English and in Spanish, because sometimes you find people that know more Spanish than you and than they take what you say in a different way. Like before I would have felt very uncomfortable doing this interview, and now I don't feel so much that way.

I: It sounds as if you saying that you feel more confident. Is that right?

C: Yes, I feel more confident and secure in myself than before. It has helped me to not be so shy, and to want to socialize more with people, and to not be so timid.

Several factors were associated with the women being more reserved and timid prior to attending the program. The women linked their shyness to their inability to speak English, their "ignorance," (a term which all but three of the women used to describe themselves before program participation), their feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem. One participant attributed her shyness to cultural factors when she surmised, "I was very shy and timid. I was just like all Mexican women. I think that we are all very reserved." Certainly, the majority of women that participated in *MAS* and *Superando* may have been shy, but it is doubtful that this is true for all Mexican women. Based on their comments, however, it is plausible that undereducated, lower income immigrants, such as the participants in this study, may be more likely to be shy due to the factors formerly discussed. Delgado-Gaitan's (2001) study related similar changes as a result of their participation in a community collaborative. Likewise, King's (2000) study of ESL learners indicated that as students' English skills increased so did their confidence.

Overcoming Depression. Not surprisingly, the women's low self-esteem went hand in hand with feelings of depression. Earlier within this chapter, feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression associated with the women's cultural adjustment were discussed. Over half of the participants cited depression as a concern for themselves when they entered the program. These women discussed how program participation helped them to surmount their feelings of depression. Overcoming depression and increasing well-being is the ultimate realization of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). As can be seen in the following dialogue, Christianne was one mother who struggled with feelings of depression:

I: How do you think you were before beginning the program?

C: I was very depressed and Lucía [parent educator and home visitor] has helped me to come out of this depression. I was also a little more reserved; I kept everything to myself. And I learned that this can do a lot of damage. And I came here and got out a lot of frustrations and problems that I carried inside.

I: And now, how do you feel?

C: I feel very good. Before, I was a very picky person; my personality was very difficult to handle. But now all this talking with the other women here has made me reflect more on myself. I am more controlled; I can talk now instead of shout. I can think before answering. That was my problem; I said things without thinking and I was always hurting someone. I would hurt them by what I said. And now I think before I say what I'm thinking.

Christianne's ability to critically reflect and connect with others was at the core of her transformation. Her story demonstrates how participating in a group can be a powerful tool in assisting individuals to become aware of their own personal strengths and limitations. The process of listening, sharing, and empathizing with others can help individuals become aware of and responsible for their own behavior. Christianne took action to change her behavior and as a result rose above her depression.

Concepcion also described how the program helped her transcend her depression through learning English and the social connections she built through the program:

> When I came to the program, my life changed more. It's much better, I learned to interact with friends, to listen to people with similar experiences as I have. I feel now some liberty, some freedom. If I go out I now see things with color. I can now say to people 'Hi, good morning.' I am not afraid anymore. I had a terrible fear of getting on the bus; I could not go to an appointment if it was not for someone accompanying me. But when I learned to use the bus system here in the program, I got liberty.

Concepcion's story demonstrates the power of literacy. Concepcion was not able to read or write when she began the program, nor could she speak any English. She suffered greatly from depression and lived in fear, and shame. She did not trust others and was socially isolated when she found *Superando*. The program has truly transformed her life. She is now able to speak English, read and write, and has overcome her feelings of depression and isolation.

Other women reported similar transformations, Margarita simply said, "If I had never come here I would have been lost in a deep depression." Thalia also shared, "My life would be much harder, without purpose, and I would be much sadder." The women primarily attributed these affective transformations to the support they received in the program. Regina, who recently cut ties with her abusive family and was confronting her own issues of low self-esteem and depression exemplified this association:

> Yes, because for example, here in the program you find a lot of all kinds of support. So if someone has a problem then they help you to get a counselor. Simply talking with someone to vent is a very big help. For me it has been very important. For me it has helped me to come out of my depression, it has been even more important for me because I don't have family that I can vent to. It's like a support.

The findings within this section document the stories of women who had the courage to engage in learning that reaches deep within their understanding of themselves and their social conditions. Their new understanding of themselves and the world around them brought forth important transformations. Most notably, the women reported increased self-confidence and decreased depression, which they accredited to transformative learning opportunities made available through their program participation in *MAS* and *Superando*. The programs facilitated transformative learning

opportunities for students by building a foundation of trust where the women were able to begin asking difficult questions of themselves. Through the program the women cultivated critical thinking skills, which was at the core of their transformative learning.

Relationship Changes Within the Family

As the women became empowered and began to explore new roles, this inevitably had consequences for their closest relationships. The inner transformations experienced by the women were taken home and communicated to their husbands. Many of the women reported interacting with their husbands in very different ways than before, such as being more assertive, more communicative, and more independent. These changes that the women made through their transformative learning experiences were the outermost manifestations of their learning and development, which resulted in a power shift in their relationships with their husbands.

In many instances the women had to renegotiate their relationships with their husbands. These findings are representative of the final stages of perspective transformations, where the women were actively exploring their new roles, developing self-confidence in their new roles, and reintegrating these new roles into their daily lives as a result of their new perspectives. (Mezirow, 1991). The transformations that occurred within their intimate partner relationships were most illustrative of the dramatic changes that can take place when adult learners engaged in transformative learning take action in changing their lives. These actions can be risky and the learners

at this stage of their transformative learning are in great need of support in order to deal with the consequences of their actions (King, 2005).

Findings from my analysis revealed three key stages linked to relationship changes between husbands and wives as a consequence of the women taking action through their transformative learning. The first stage occurred at the point when the women began program participation and husbands were initially resistant to their participation and the emerging changes they witnessed within their wives. The second stage involved a shift in the husbands' attitudes towards their wives' participation in *MAS* and *Superando.* The third phase was the transformation of the men and the relationship itself. The following sections will describe these findings in detail.

Stage 1: "At first he did not want me to go to school"

Initially, ten of the fifteen women experienced resistance from their husbands in regards to their program participation. The husbands of these ten women did not want their wives participating in the program. Carmela's husband was particularly opposed to her going to school.

> At first he would get mad, he would say that it bothered him that I was going to school because I wanted to not because he was sending me. It was four, five months after I'd already been coming and he still had not accepted that I go to school. At first he would say in a mean way, 'look, how nice, you're out while your house is all dirty.' He would ask me how I was going to do all the chores, make meals, and still have time to go to school. He did not think I was capable of doing all these things. But I would explain to him it would benefit us both if I went to school, and not just me. He had the custom, how they believe in Mexico, of believing that men leave the home and work and the woman stays at home cleaning. Women do not improve themselves, they don't do anything. But now I am seeing things in a very different way, it is not right that the man goes out and the woman just stays and does the chores.

Thalia shared a similar experience, but she decided to separate from her husband when he did not support her decision to go to school:

> He did not want me to go to school. I told him that I did not agree with him because it's never too late to learn, to continue forward, and he is completely backward. It was usually him that decided everything, for a long time, but right now that I have been going to school I have learned so much, I have learned that we are equals, that we have the same rights. That I can also decide, that we can also decide things together and things can be done better that way. For example, he is very difficult because in the beginning I taught my sons to clean the house, wash dishes, sweep, and he didn't do anything. He would say that men did not have to do those things, we did not agree on this matter, because I thought differently than he did. And so we separated. And it has been difficult, he does not want to accept many things, and it has been difficult.

My findings indicate that the husbands' negative reactions to their wives' desire to further their educations were based in fear. Margarita illustrated this when she said, "My husband didn't want me to come, because he was afraid that I will divorce him."

Azucena offered similar insight into her husband's resistance:

> He doesn't accept it, because he had heard comments from his friends like, '[at the program] they only teach you to come and fight with your husband or to separate from him. The program puts the wives against their husbands.'

Verónica also said, "My husband didn't want me to go to school there, because he had heard that the women get crazy ideas in their heads and then want to leave their husbands."

The husbands in all probability had heard some true stories of women, such as Thalia, who decided to leave her husband when he wasn't supportive of her participation in the program. Some women do make drastic changes in their lives as a result of their transformative learning. The rumors of the most dramatic cases of

women's transformative learning were of course those that were most talked about and naturally feared.

In truth, from the husbands' perspective, they likely felt that the women did learn "crazy ideas" at *MAS* and *Superando*. It was difficult for the men when their wives discussed women's rights with them and even more challenging when the women tried to make changes in their lives based on their new perspectives. The following excerpt from Paloma's interview exemplifies this:

> P: Well, it has changed me because no I don't let him do what he did before. Now I don't let him. I do not let him mistreat me anymore and that I tell him that I have rights as his wife. That I have the right to make my own decisions and I talk to him about the rights that I have. That I have the right to tell him if I don't want to, and to make decisions, that I have the right to many things.
>
> I: What does he think about that?
>
> P: Well sometimes he tells me that I don't behave well, that they advise me badly when I go to the school. Because I don't let him treat me badly anymore, and he thinks like that but I know that I have the right to him helping me in the house and with the kids.

When women asserted themselves it was not only difficult for the husbands, because they did not want to relinquish power, but they also experienced disapproval from peers and family members. For example, Ilia shared, "he doesn't like me going to the program, because his family tells him that it's not a good idea for me to go, because they think I should stay home."

Similarly, Soledad's in-laws were quite negative about her participation:

> My husband did not want me to come here. His family told him that I changed after coming and they didn't like that, because they think I control him. He used to give money to everybody [in the family] when he was single, before we were married. Little by little he gave less and less and they blame me. It is worse now, because since I started the program I also ask him to do more and they don't like it.

A program evaluation of a human rights training program for women in Turkey (Kardam, 2003) reported similar findings. The study revealed that husbands were threatened by their wives' participation and sometimes those feelings were expressed as resistance, opposition, and in the most extreme cases, violence. The evaluator reported that in-laws, particularly mother in laws, were also resistant to the women's participation.

Research has also found that Mexican men have resisted their wives participation in other public spheres. For instance, Zavella's (1985) study of Mexican cannery workers found that one-third of the husbands were resistant to their wives' working outside of the home. Working wives interviewed by Ybarra (1982) found that Mexican women experienced guilt over working outside of the home, because of the negative consequences that their employment had on their children. This guilt was exasperated by their husbands' lack of support and resistance to their work.

Studies of Mexican women's activism have also found similar trends. One study of Mexican women garment workers that organized a union and went out on strike, reported that some of the women encountered resistance from their husbands. The husbands complained that the women's political commitments came at the expense of family well-being (Ruiz, 1987). Similar conclusions were drawn from Barbara Kingsolver's (1983) account of women who organized and picketed against a small mining company in Southern Arizona. As a result of their activism the women experienced family conflict, impoverishment, community dissention, and violence. The Latino husbands objected to their wives picketing, which only led the women to

accelerate their activism. In Kingsolver's words, "Some of the women had the full support of their families, while others...were fighting in several wars at once." (p. 84).

Latino family scholars have written extensively about Mexican men's maintenance of male dominance and the retention of women's isolation from the White mainstream culture (Anderson, 1996; Anzaldua, 1999; Baca Zinn, 1980; Matthiason, Mirande, 1988; Ortiz, 1995; Williams, 1990; Zavella, 1987). These scholars have posited that men's preservation of power and control in the private sphere serves to secure masculine identity and self-esteem. In addition, some scholars have maintained that the oppression of Mexican women has been an important prerequisite for men's resistance to their own oppression by Whites (Anderson, 1996; Anzaldua, 1999; Mirande, 1988).

Anderson (1996) argued that the debate on the meaning of machismo directly reveals the complex interaction between class, race, and gender. Mirande's (1988) controversial work postulated that machismo symbolizes resistance to acculturation and assimilation into American society. Anzaldua (1999) further argued that both the meaning and the concept of machismo were created by Anglos, and that for Mexicanos machismo is an adaptation to oppression, poverty, and low self esteem. Cheryl, the program coordinator of *MAS*, agrees that the men's resistance to their wives' program participation is directly linked to their own oppression:

> I have been working with these families for several years now and I have seen the pain and frustrations experienced by the men, they're dealing with their own stuff related to their low wage jobs, horrible working conditions, poverty, oppression. I have seen tons of alcoholism as a means of coping and they're afraid when their wives begin to change. It's scary for them, but you can get through to these

> men...little by little. There has to be a hook for them and once we've got 'em we can really make a difference, but I have learned it is important to work directly with the men and give them their own space where they can deal with all of their issues too.

She began a men's group after I interviewed the women, because she saw a real need for the men to have a safe space where they are able to discuss their issues and concerns. The group directly deals with fathering, how to foster healthy relationships with their wives, and self-esteem. She related that this has made a real difference in how the men view the program and interact with their wives and children; however, Cheryl related, "the struggle is to get them there."

Anderson (1996) posited that because families can not expect to live consistently within a set of norms where masculine power remains unchallenged, family relations are complex and as a result there is often a disparity between patriarchal norms and the actual reality of family practice. She further maintains that consequently many Mexican men subscribe strongly to an ideology of family privacy. In my research, the women reported that their husbands were uncomfortable with their wives' program participation because they feared it would make them vulnerable to ridicule and shame. Within her interview, Ariana expressed her husbands' concerns, "He doesn't want me to come, because he is embarrassed. He doesn't think it is right for others to know about our private life." Ilia also shared similar insight into her husband's resistance, "He thinks that is shameful for me to talk about our personal life to others." Matthiason's (1974) research revealed similar findings, where men emphatically tried to maintain their family's privacy, because they believed it was disgraceful.

Anderson (1996) observed that men's desire to control the public representation of family life has created enormous constraints for Mexican women. She wrote,

> An examination of women's agency in these processes reveals what much of the scholarship on family life and women's power has missed – the understanding that women do not automatically translate resources into power. Their ability to do so is contested by the men in their families with the result that they have to struggle to secure access to outside resources to claim the familial power which those resources facilitate (p. 132).

My findings support Anderson's interpretations of the literature on Latino families. The women in this study faced opposition from their husbands when trying to access resources to facilitate transformative learning. King (2005) has also observed similar consequences for students engaged in transformative learning. She maintains that "when learners step into action they are poised on a precipice of risk. At the same time that they look back and to the future, learners need to count the cost of their actions and plan for the consequences" (p. 109). The women in my study might not have participated in the program if they had planned for the consequences of their actions or perhaps they did, but decided to participate anyway. In hindsight, this is something I wish I had explored further within the interviews.

Despite the negative consequences and backlash from their husbands, in-laws, and others the women persevered. The program staff were very supportive of the women through these difficult times, so that the women were able to continue pursuing their education despite the negative repercussions. One of the mothers said, "Things with my husband were very difficult, but the program has been so supportive

of me and that has made all of this worth it." The program coordinators discussed with me how they do not force sensitive topics with their students.

> We believe that it is important to meet them where they are and respect them. If a parent isn't ready to explore an issue, we don't go there. We want them to succeed, but it has to be at their own pace.

This approach is fundamental to facilitating transformative learning and reflects of the program's teaching methods guided by the work of Paolo Freire, who believed that in order to change lives you have to begin with what the learner already knows and what they are ready to accept (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). He also taught that in order to empower others you have to operate from hope rather than despair (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). If *MAS* and *Superando* pushed women too far in places where they were not ready to go, the participants would likely not have continued in the program, defeating the purpose. Clearly, these program participants felt that the program addressed these topics with sensitivity. When asked how she felt about discussing her relationship with her husband in the program, as opposed to just focusing on learning English, Maya said:

> Well at first I only wanted to learn English and so I didn't see the point, but it's not like they push it on you or force you talk about it if you don't want to. They make you feel respected. I feel safe here and supported and being able to talk about my relationship with my husband has made my relationship stronger.

The program staff set the stage to facilitate transformative learning by creating a safe space for the women. Transformative learning theorists have discussed that providing safe and supportive learning environments is the most essential component in creating transformative learning opportunities for adult learners (Daloz, 1999; Mezirow, 1997; Pilling-Cormick, 1997). King (2005) also portends that when learners are acting upon

their transformative learning (e.g., participating in a program despite their husbands' resistance) is when they are in need of the most support.

Stage 2: The Husbands Change Their Attitudes

The analysis revealed that after some time the husbands came to terms with their wives' participation in the program. Paloma describes this transformation in her husband's attitude:

> When I started to look for a place to study, I found the program and he said that he didn't want me to go because he didn't know how I was I going to get there with two kids taking the bus. I felt like a mouse in a hole, I wanted to get out but I couldn't. And then I met a neighbor that did go to the program and I felt jealous, but in a good way not a bad way, that she went and I also wanted to go. So I had to make the decision that I wanted to go. And I told my husband I want to go and I don't want to just be here anymore. It was in the morning like at eight, and I told him, well he didn't say anything to me, but I could tell that he didn't approve. I just made the decision and went. And they accepted me. And when I started to come to the program I didn't ask my husband for permission. I just came. I just told him about the program and I told him that I was going to come. In the beginning he was very angry with me and was mean to me and I didn't know if I could bear it; but now he supports me; he sees that I am progressing and that it's good. I show him that I'm improving in my writing and math. And he sees that I'm improving in my English. He also sees that I am so much happier and that makes him happy. He likes it, and thinks that it's a good program now. He comes to the program when we have a parent night, and he knows what we're about.

For some of the husbands, like Paloma's, seeing their wife's improvement in literacy and overall well-being was enough to change their attitude about the program. As Cheryl, one of the program coordinators, said, "it's a matter of finding that hook for the husband and that varies amongst them." For the majority of the husbands it was the improvement they saw in their children. Carmela, whose husband was initially very resistant to her program participation, said:

> ...He was not supportive, but then I pleaded with him to just come and see the program for himself. In December we had a celebration here and he came. It was there that he saw that all the other Dads came and he saw all of our son's art work and how much he had improved. The teacher shared with him how much our son was learning. He also saw how much he loved to come to school and how much more he was talking. I think it was then that he reflected and came to the decision that he was going to attend all of the stuff and special events for parents. After that he never said anything negative to me again.

Thalia, who separated from her husband due to his lack of support of her participation in the program, eventually got back together with her husband. She explained that the separation gave him a wake up call and he realized that if they were going to work things out he was going to have to support her participation in the program.

> ...The separation helped him to understand all that I was feeling. He realized that he can not make all the decisions, he is even realizing that I have to participate in the program. He can now see the benefit that the program has for our children. He is even participating in the family events here now.

Thalia's experience was the most drastic example of changes in family dynamics that can occur as a result of transformative learning. None of the other participants reported divorcing or separating from their husbands as a result of their program participation. The women that reported experiencing resistance from their husbands related that their relationships initially worsened until they learned to re-establish their relationships on a different level.

Other studies have reported women choosing divorce when they could not find a common ground with their husbands. Women in Zavella's (1987) study of California cannery workers, found that employment with adequate wages and the support from women friends enabled the women to leave marriages that had become too confining. Anderson (1996) reported that for Mexican women involved in activism it is not

uncommon for women to experience such outcomes. One activist she interviewed stated, "...a traditional Mexican male does not like the type of women that I am now. From my experiences any Chicana that's into something that's an activist, she's divorced" (p, 146).

Perhaps the women in my study would have been more apt to leave their husbands if they had more financial resources, as the majority of the participants were not working in order to participate in the program. Another possible reason could be that because the other studies focused on women activists, who were likely more radical in terms of expressing their individual rights and in turn less likely to tolerate any form of domination from men. Further, the programs focused not only on bolstering the women's sense of self and raising their feminist consciousness, but also discussed how to foster healthy family relationships. The women's accounts indicate that the support they received through the program buffered their marital relationships from dissolution.

Stage 3: Transformations Within The Men and Marital Relationships

Once the husbands became more supportive and understanding of the women's participation in the program, relationships improved. All of the women related ways in which their relationships with their husbands have been enhanced by participation in the program. The improved relationships, however, did not happen overnight and for most it was a process that involved the relationship worsening before improving. Luz,

who realized that her husband was emotionally and verbally abusive through the program, offers a good example of this transformation.

> At first I only believed if your husband was beating you or hitting you that this was abuse, I didn't believe the things that they were telling me here, that there is such a thing as verbal abuse. Eventually, I changed my thinking. It was then that I realized that my husband was abusing me with his words. I learned that this was not right and went home feeling like I was even more angry and depressed. I was mad at him, with myself and the fighting got worse. We fought all the time, like two little kids. There were broken plates, it was really bad. We fought mostly about his drinking. He had problems with alcohol. I have heard that there are divorces and I considered leaving, but I wanted to work things out for our son. So I stayed and the program really helped me through this, just being able to talk about it helped me out of my depression. Then my husband found out that he had a bad kidney, because of his drinking and now he doesn't drink anymore. This helped us a lot and he started to change. Little by little he began to listen to me more. I told him about all of the things that I was learning in the program. Our communication improved a lot. I also learned how to listen to him more, rather than just yell. I also told him about how he needs to be more involved in raising our son. He tries to talk to my son more now and sit with me more often. This program has helped us a lot and now we know how to treat our son.

Luz was one of two women who explicitly discussed experiencing domestic violence within her marriage. Her story is one of the most dramatic accounts of how intimate partnerships transformed for the better. Other women reported similar outcomes as Luz, although to a lesser degree.

The most commonly cited reason for improved marital relationships was improved communication. When asked what was the most important way the program has helped her, Verónica shared how better communication resulted in less fights between her and her husband.

> First, it has helped with my communication with my husband. We always ended up disagreeing about something. I would say something and he would say another thing and it was just always back and forth. In the program I learned that is important not to always blame him and

> listen more to him. I am more patient and he sees how much I am trying and he is trying harder, too.

Maya was able to make the connection between her increased personal awareness and improvements in her relationship.

> As I am getting more educated all that I am learning here I am taking home with me. I have learned in the program why I behave certain ways and how to understand more about what I am feeling. This has helped me to be a better communicator with my partner. I am sharing all that I am learning here with him and he is now hearing me out. Together we are always looking for new ways of doing things. In this way our home is changing for the better.

Maya's account exemplifies the final stages of transformative learning, where she is testing new roles, making decisions and has reintegrated her new perspectives in her life. She has actively included her husband in her transformative learning process by communicating to him more openly, which is something that she said was difficult for her to do before attending the program. All of the women reflected on how they interacted with their husbands in different ways as a result of the changes within themselves. Carmela reported gaining more autonomy and independence,

> Yes, we have learned to get along better. He used to be so controlling of me. Now we have learned that it is good for us to have our own alone time from each other. Before when I wanted to go out on my own he would ask me a lot of questions, 'why are you leaving? Where are you going? Why do you need to go? You have a home. He would tell me I was acting crazy. He would always go out and I would be left alone and stressed out with my son. Now he listens to me more and understands that it is important for me to go out alone sometimes.

These findings are consistent with what we would expect to see based on transformative learning theory, which is about critically questioning yourself, social relationships, and redefining oneself and how one interacts with the world around them. Mezirow (1997) articulated that learners may experience many consequences

while involved in the transformative learning process, but it is at the point when individuals take action to change their circumstances that they experience the major impact of this process. Within this study, the women reported a myriad of ways in which their lives had been impacted by transformative learning, but the changes in their relationships were some of the most compelling and validating.

Father Involvement. One of the most salient outcomes reported by the mothers was that some of the fathers became more involved in their children's lives as a result of their wives' program participation. For Azucena, her expanded worldview of gender roles was linked to her husband's increased involvement with his family.

> Before I came I thought that his only responsibility was just to work and bring home money for us and not take care of the kids and the house. And now my thinking has changed. Before I used to ask him 'Will you take care of the kids for me?' As if I was asking him a favor. Now everything has changed, because I have learned that I am not the only one responsible. He is also responsible for taking care of them because they are also *his* children. And I also have the right to go out alone to the store or something if I need to and he can watch his children. And he accepts them now. We've talked about this and he agrees.

More importantly, she shared how her husband has become more involved in family activities as well.

> He is doing more with the kids than before. Now we play UNO and Chutes and Ladders all together as a family and before he was never interested. Also, the other day I came home and they were all together reading on the bed. Before, he would never read to them. I was so happy.

Thalia, who had eight children, some of which were now adults, also related similar changes in her husband's involvement with their children.

> He would not read with our older children. Now with all I have learned about how important it is to read to your children, I have told him that it is important for him to read to the children, to talk with them. Now if

> the children ask him to read he does. He also is expressing a lot more emotions with them. This is something that when I reflect on I feel happy and sad at the same time. It makes me happy that things are better, but sad to think about all the mistakes we made with the older ones. Now I know we could have raised them much better and they would have had better self esteem.

The knowledge and self-confidence the women gained in the program translated to improved family relationships and well-being. As a result of participating in the program the women were better able to articulate their needs and advocate on behalf of their children. The women's ability to influence their husbands to participate more actively in the lives of their children is powerful testimony for the use of the transformative learning teaching methods with low income Latina mothers. Through critically reflecting and questioning their own beliefs and cultural norms the women took action to transform their family life. Although the women initially experienced negative consequences for these actions, eventually their efforts were rewarded. These findings were consistent with previous research on the impact of family literacy on relationships, including increased father involvement of both White and Latino fathers (Merrill, 2001; Pamulapati, 2003). Delgado-Gaitan (2001) also reported that Mexican immigrant families engaged in a community collective, improved family relationships as individuals became empowered. Fathers and mothers both increased their involvement in their children's lives and educations through their participation in the community collaborative.

The women's descriptions of their husbands were consistent with the two contrasting images of Latino fathers available in the literature. Ten of the fifteen women described their husbands as aloof and emotionally distant, which aligns with Mirande's (1988) description of Latino fathers. Another five of the women described

their husbands as more nurturing and active with their children, which is similar to what other research has found (Bronstein, 1994; Hawkes & Taylor, 1975; Grebler, Moore, & Guzman, 1970; Powell, 1995). Powell (1995) argues that there is limited research on Latino fathers and much has been anecdotal, making designing research based intervention programs for Latino fathers difficult.

The women who described their husbands as more emotionally available to their children also reported that their husbands were supportive of their participation in the program and initially demonstrated more egalitarian approaches to decision making within the family. Concepcion's description of her husband exemplifies the more egalitarian father:

> My husband and I have a good relationship. My husband agrees that I should come here. He is in agreement that I should be studying. He mainly likes that the children are studying, too. He knows that the more English I know the more I can help the family. My husband works so much that he doesn't have the time to go to school and since he only studied for two years in school, like second grade, he doesn't know how to read or write. So, I have to do all of the paper work and things for the household, so he understands the importance of me improving my English, my reading and math. He wants me to be able to help our children more in school so they can have a better future.

When asked whether he helps out at home she responded, "Oh yes, my husband can clean a kitchen as good as a woman! He is always helping around the house when he has time." Interestingly, four of the five women who described their husbands as more egalitarian reported that their husbands had much lower literacy skills then they had. Many of the husbands never went to school or dropped out well before they finished elementary school. The husbands, in turn, relied on their wives to manage the household finances, educate the children, and keep the family healthy, because they were incapable of filling out and reading all of the forms associated with these

institutions. The other woman that described her husband as more egalitarian and very involved with their children was on the other end of the spectrum in terms of education. Her husband had an engineering degree from Mexico and was working in a preschool classroom as an aide for a child with special needs.

> My husband is not like the typical macho Mexican. He changes diapers, feeds and clothes the kids. I go to work on Saturdays and since it is his day off he is with the kids all day and he doesn't complain. I am really lucky in that way. He is very good with the kids, he works with them so he knows how to treat them.

My data hints that the fathers who were at the two ends of the education spectrum may have had more egalitarian gender roles within the families. I have not encountered other studies that have found similar findings in the literature on Latino families and may be a topic worth further exploration.

All women in the study reported that their relationships improved as a result of program participation, even for the women who described their relationships as good when they began the program. The program fostered healthy family relationships through increasing the women's capacity to effectively communicate their needs in their relationships. As the women built self-confidence and critically reflected on their relationships they were able to become more assertive and self confident. As one mother shared, "now I feel like we are more equals. Like we are a team, because before I was too timid to tell him how I felt." These findings are what we would expect to see based on the transformative learning theory. Essentially, the women became empowered through their transformative learning experiences, which in turn, like a pebble thrown in water, rippled out and transformed the way they relate with others.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This research documents the power of an integrated family literacy program in facilitating transformative learning experiences in the lives of fifteen Mexican immigrant women. The women in this study exemplify the courage needed to bring learning into one's inner life, and illustrates how doing so permeates all aspects of one's life, particularly intimate relationships. Utilizing a qualitative approach, this research was able to examine deeply rooted personal changes in the lives of the women interviewed. The women provided rich accounts of how their experiences in *MAS* and *Superando,* two family literacy programs, were central to fundamental shifts in the understanding of their lives and the world. The women's stories give life to the meaning of human potential and the power of education to transform individuals and families.

The process of participating in this research was a transformative learning experience in and of itself. The questions asked during the interviews engaged these women in the process of questioning and critical reflection, key components of transformative learning. The questions asked forced the women to think about their past experiences and to reflect on the ways in which their lives had been transformed through their participation in family literacy.

The interview process may have been the first time that some of the participants realized they had experienced a profound change. King writes that "sometimes people who experience transformative learning primarily experience the changes within their cognitive inner world" (2005, p. 8). She explains that often it is

not until adult learners really begin to reflect on their experiences that they realize the changes that have occurred in themselves and their lives. For some of the women in my study, it was apparent that the questions asked during the interviews crystallized for them just how many changes they have made and how far they have come. These realizations were powerful and elicited a lot of emotion for the participants, which neither they nor I were truly prepared for. It was an honor to be a part of their transformative learning process, even if for only a brief time.

Personal Reflection

During the process of interviewing and analyzing the data, I too, experienced my own transformative learning. To my surprise I was profoundly struck by the paradox of completing my doctoral degree, while interviewing women who had to fight just to complete elementary school. This paradox was painful for me and at times led me to want to abandon this project. At the same time, however, the women's strength and resiliency provided me with the motivation to want to tell their stories. I kept thinking about their courage to share their experiences with me, and how unfair it would be to not complete this project after they had been so gracious to accommodate my own selfish needs of completing a dissertation.

I was not prepared for these feelings that I experienced throughout this process. Particularly, because when I began this project I already had had a lot of previous experience interviewing other Even Start participants and low income women in rural communities. The face of poverty and its devastating effects were not new to me. So, I did not think that I would hear anything new that I had not heard before. The women's stories of their interrupted educations were not new to me, but the way in which they

became so emotional about it was new. Other women I have interviewed have not been so affected by that aspect of their childhoods, abuse and neglect were more emotionally charged topics for others, but with these women it overwhelmingly was their lack of education that was most painful. As I immersed myself in the data and became intimately familiar with the women and their lives it was this aspect that affected me the most. I was struck by how distinctly different our life paths had been. In my upbringing going to college was an expectation, not an option. Both of my parents were educators and going to school was the most important job that I had growing up. I went to the best schools in my community and was rewarded for good grades. All of my friends were even more privileged than I was. I actually thought that I grew up in a poor family, because in comparison to my peers I was at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum. Looking back on this now, it's almost humorous, but strangely sad to me at the same the time to think how much I took for granted.

When I developed the interview protocol I naively did not think that these interviews would elicit very much emotion. I really believed that the interview protocol was benign. I did not bring tissues to the first few interviews, because I did not think that there was any emotionally stirring content within the protocol. My research assistant and I were horribly embarrassed by this during the first few interviews when the women had emotional outbursts as they spoke about their childhoods. My research assistant was angry with me for not preparing her better. She said, "You are so mean you are making them all cry and I am the one that looks bad."

All of this came back to me as I read through the transcripts. I kept trying to get into their shoes and feel what they must have felt, but no matter how hard I

reached inside of myself I could not really imagine a childhood without school everyday, toys, free time, and probably most importantly, balanced meals. Even though I was already aware from my classes and all of the reading I have done that many people in the world have experienced extreme poverty and the impact and consequences of poverty, these women's stories affected me on a deeper level. Every time I would complain about how hard the research and writing process was, I would think back about their sadness related to their interrupted educations. Immediately I felt ridiculous for complaining. Their stories kept me motivated, because I continually reminded myself that the opportunity to write a dissertation is a privilege that few have the opportunity to complete.

Other feelings of guilt accompanied these thought processes, including the inherent power differential between the women I studied and myself. If I had to do this over again there are many things that I would change, including pursuing a more participatory action approach to my methodology. I would have involved the women more proactively in the research process than I did, so that they could help craft and shape their stories and have more of a say in the final product. I would also liked to have been more open with them and given them the opportunity to ask me more questions to lessen the power differential that inevitably exists between the researcher and the researched. I would not, however, change the research topic, because it remains fascinating to me. Hearing these women's stories led to a shift in my own consciousness as I explored my own power and privilege. I believe now more than ever it is important to advocate for human rights and education. My convictions around these topics were reinforced and are stronger as a result of this process. I

sincerely hope that the women also gained something valuable from their participation in this research as well as future women and their families.

Research Implications

MAS and *Superando* practice adult education built on a humanistic educational philosophy aimed at eliciting transformative learning experiences for students. The goals of the adult educators are to assist learners in facing their challenges by coming to deeper understandings of themselves and proactively create a vision of new possibilities. The results of this study provide evidence for the power of this approach. Their explicit discussion of human rights, particularly women's rights, was central to the women's transformative learning experiences. Women reported that learning about their rights was personally validating and led to increased self-confidence.

Learning about gender-based discrimination, particularly for women who were married to traditional husbands, was cited as the primary reason for relationship changes with intimate partners. These accounts of how their relationships changed provided further evidence of the women's transformations. The women related how learning new ideas and critically reassessing their former assumptions about their family roles led many of them to make drastic changes to the way they related with their husbands. In my opinion, these changes were the most compelling. It is particularly intriguing that the women who described having little power in their relationships were able to create shifts in the power dynamics of their relationships through education. Women described remarkable changes that they observed in their husbands' thinking and behavior towards them (the women), education, parenting, and

their children. These transformations, are unlikely to have occurred had the women not been actively engaged in their own powerful personal transformations.

These findings were particularly unexpected based on the focus group data that incited the initial interest in this research topic. I expected to uncover that these programs were culturally inappropriate and creating negative consequences for the families that they served. In initial meetings with program staff about my research they joked with me that they are in the business of creating divorces. My research, however, found the opposite and in fact, indicates that the program is in the business of making marriages stronger and healthier.

Limitations

In assessing the validity and contributions of a particular research project, it is critical to discuss the weaknesses as well as the strengths. All research studies have limitations and this project is certainly no exception. The first and most obvious limitation is the sample, which was small (N = 15) and self-selected. The women's willingness to participate in the study may have set them apart from other program participants. Moreover, the women in the research study overrepresented committed program participants, as only women who were in the program for at least six months were invited to participate. This was purposely done to ensure that women had been in the program long enough to relate some changes that have occurred in their lives as a result of their program participation. Although this was necessary, it is important to consider this when interpreting the results.

The women who were interviewed represented women that were willing to stay in the program and perhaps were more open to these types of transformative

learning experiences. In addition, the women's willingness to participate in a research study about their program participation, may have resulted in a sample of women that were by nature more open and willing to share about their lives and in turn more likely to engage in transformative learning experiences. Furthermore, the women were married to men who were willing to weather the changes in their wives and were themselves ready for transformative learning experiences.

The fact that the women were participating in such an intensive family literacy program in and of itself was a limiting factor. These women were extremely personally motivated to change their lives. They were attracted to family literacy, because they were experiencing acculturative stress when they enrolled in the program making them prime candidates for transformative learning experiences.

All of the women discussed the fact that their interrupted education was profoundly painful for them which made me ponder whether the women had other personal characteristics that influenced them to participate in the family literacy programs and proactively embark in pioneering a better future for themselves and their children. Others may not be so deeply impacted by the inability to complete school. Individuals who did not like school, or found school extremely difficult, may not have been so motivated or willing to further their educational experiences. For the women in this study, not being able to continue with their schooling was one of the primary life experiences that set the stage for their strong desire to participate in *MAS* and *Superando*. Given this common experience, it is plausible that these women were more academically gifted and had untapped potential for success that was never realized because of their social locations within Mexican society. Future research is

needed to examine the personal attributes of family literacy participants that remain in the program compared to those who drop out.

Another limitation of this study is that I only interviewed the women on one occasion. In addition, the interviews were retrospective accounts of their program participation. The retrospective nature of the interviews may have distorted or resulted in exaggerated changes in their lives. Ideally, I would have liked to follow the participants over time and observe transformative learning experiences as they transpired. Further, only the women were interviewed about their perceptions about how their relationships had transformed as a result of participating in the program. Interviews with the husbands and observations of the couples interacting together would likely have enriched the study.

Finally, the fact that the participants were aware that I was the evaluator of the program may have altered the women's responses. The women's responses may have been more positively skewed to paint the program in the best light. The women may have been careful to only discuss positive outcomes of the program for fear of the program losing funding. The women may have also only told me what they thought I wanted to hear.

Despite these limitations, I feel confident that my study still provides an important contribution. Even though I interviewed women that remained in the program for at least six months, this is not unusual for Even Start participants in Oregon (Richards, Sano, & Merrill, 2003) or nationally. The average Even Start mother remains in the program for a year (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). The women in this study are representative of the typical Latina participant in Oregon. The

women in this study did not have any unique demographic characteristics that made them stand out from other Even Start participants. Therefore, this study illustrates the remarkable learning that can occur in this population, given a program like *Superando* and *MAS*.

Ironically, my role as program evaluator also provided entree to this difficult-to-reach population (Umaña-Taylor & Bámanca, 2004). The support of my research by the program staff was critical in gaining access to the participants. The program staff enthusiastically introduced me as the program evaluator and someone that could be trusted. Gaining the participants trust was crucial to the success of this research and the willingness of the women to talk to me. My role as program evaluator was a double-edged sword as it both facilitated my access to the women and simultaneously might have distorted their responses.

Implications for Programs and Policy

The findings from this research provide support for the effectiveness of utilizing transformative learning teaching methods with recent Mexican immigrant women. The women's powerful accounts of how their lives were transformed through family literacy also demonstrate the need for fully integrated education programs that serve the whole person and family. The data indicate that the use of transformative learning techniques with recent immigrants can deepen the experience of adult education to promote important socio-cultural and personal changes. The participants specifically cited that learning about gender based discrimination and women's rights facilitated the biggest personal and social transformations. Dialogue about social inequalities was particularly empowering for the women, because it made them

consciously aware that their social positions are related to a complex set of factors for which they are not responsible (Freire, 1973; Valdes, 1996). This new framework for understanding was incredibly validating for the women. Kardam's (2003) study of a human rights education program targeted for Turkish women also provides further evidence that teaching about one's rights brings about enormous changes for the individual and their families.

At the same time that these results provide support for explicitly including learning opportunities about discrimination and rights in educational programs serving marginalized people, there are important implications to be considered. Transformative learning experiences facilitate shifts in socio-cultural orientations and epistemological beliefs. Programs engaging learners in transformative opportunities need to be keenly aware of the full implications involved in empowering families. Facilitating transformative learning opportunities in the lives of adult learners has profound ethical implications. For example, Sigel (1983) argues that ethical and moral implications are a concern whenever one intervenes in people's lives. He discusses that interventions always involve power dynamics between those that have power and knowledge and those that do not. Further, he defines interventions as a process that deliberately sets out to change people's behavior, actions, and thoughts. He maintains that interventions are based on the assumption that the "expert" or educator has the best solutions or the right answers, but he warns that solutions to problems are often complex and rarely contain a simple solution.

Therefore, it is critical that adult educators respect the rights, beliefs, values, and decisions of students (Cranton, 2000; King 2005; Taylor, 2000; Weissner &

Mezirow, 2000). Adult educators have the challenge of carefully balancing transformative learning opportunities and the student's decision to pursue it, or not. Educators must be mindful to always leave room for participants to say, "I can't go there."

The research findings here indicate that *MAS* and *Superando* were successful in providing transformative learning opportunities for the fifteen women interviewed, suggesting that the women felt safe and respected in the program. Many adult educators I have met through my work with family literacy often say, "adults vote with their feet," signifying that because adults have the freedom to choose to participate they also have the right to leave a program or class that is not meeting their needs. Adult educators I have interviewed indicated that they often use class numbers and retention as a gauge for their teaching effectiveness. The fact that *MAS* and *Superando* have the highest retention rate in the state's family literacy programs (Merrill, 2005) speaks volumes for their approach to working with families. The key to their success is their understanding and respect for the families they serve. The program understands the internal dynamics of the families they serve and celebrate their values and strengths. The program does not operate from a deficit model, which Auerbach (1989) and Valdés (1996) argue that many family literacy programs are guilty of perpetuating. My data and numerous observations of the program indicate that *MAS* and *Superando* utilize what Auerbach (1989) describes as a social-contextual approach to family literacy, which considers cultural practices and community issues. Both Valdés (1996) and Auerbach (1989) recommend this intervention model for

working with recent Mexican immigrants. My data provide further support for their recommendations.

The stories provided by the women illustrate the need for these services, particularly for recent immigrants. When the women came to the programs they were isolated, living in fear, and depressed, because they were unable to navigate the new world in which they found themselves living. They were living under new circumstances and a new set of rules that were complex and confusing. The women needed support to help their families reach success.

The personal transformations experienced by the women impacted the ways in which they related with others, particularly their closest relationships. These changes improved their marital relationships and shifted the family dynamics for the majority of the women to a more egalitarian family system. In families where women reported that their husbands demonstrated more egalitarian approaches to family decision making and were more supportive of their wives' program participation also reported improved marital relations. The women cited that learning about their rights as women and explicitly discussing healthy communication in relationships elicited these positive changes. These findings provide evidence for including these topics in family literacy curricula. More importantly, these outcomes provide further support for the transformative learning approach, where programs remain open to the needs of the participants and do not solely focus on specific program outcomes.

These findings provide evidence that fathers can experience transformations via their wives' program participation. This research hints that Latino husbands may be more open to parent education and program involvement than previous research

had indicated (Powell, 1995). If husbands can change their behavior and thinking indirectly through their wives participation, it is plausible that direct involvement of fathers may speed the process of these changes or may increase the likelihood these outcomes will occur for all participants.

As previously discussed, the interviews themselves appeared to be a transformative learning experience for the women. Participating in the study and answering questions that required retrospective reflections on their program participation seemed to solidify the women's transformative learning. Given this finding, it might be beneficial to include reflective interviews, such as the interview protocol utilized in the current study, as part of regular program services. For example, when reviewing goals with participants or at exit of the program, staff might consider interviewing participants about their program experiences. Doing so might help to bring to the participants' consciousness the full impact of their program participation. The interviews would ensure that the participants had the opportunity to synthesize their experiences, increase their self awareness, and gain some closure to their program participation. As a result, this might lead to an effective tool that further elicits transformative learning and perspective transformations in the learners.

The results of this research also have important policy implications. Given the current negative political climate surrounding both Mexican immigrants and family literacy programs this research is timely. This study provides evidence for the need and importance of family literacy programs, particularly those that incorporate a transformative learning approach. Even Start programs recently received a fifty-six percent funding cut. The current administration also proposed entirely eliminating the

program from the 2007 budget. This policy decision is ironic considering that the administration is pushing similar efforts forward with "No Child Left Behind" that are less integrated and do not consider the whole family system. My research indicates that family literacy programs with a transformative learning model can positively influence families in important ways, including promoting healthy marital relations, another key agenda for the current administration.

Implications for Future Research

This research study generated many questions and implications for future research. The research findings that hinted that husbands who had fewer years of formal education than their wives were more nuturant of their relationships and more egalitarian were intriguing. These men may be more invested in their relationships because they are so dependent on their wives to negotiate the outside world for them. Although these findings are intuitive, they have not been previously discussed in the literature on Latino families. Further, research on this topic is needed with a much larger, representative sample in order to gain deeper insight into this family dynamic.

As formerly discussed, this research suggests that including explicit discourse about women's rights fostered important personal transformations as well as improved family relationships. More research is needed to further validate these findings with larger samples and with more diverse populations. Systematically exploring this topic utilizing an experimental design with control groups is needed to determine whether including these topics truly does deepen the transformative learning experiences of women. In addition, research exploring the personal attributes of participants and families that benefit from transformational learning experiences is needed as well.

Exploring the factors associated with women who seek and remain in family literacy services in comparison to those who do not would be a worthwhile research endeavor that could deepen our understanding of how to better serve Mexican immigrant families. Exploring comparisons within and between ethnic groups utilizing transformative learning practices and curriculum that focuses on raising awareness around human rights would contribute to our understanding of how to best serve the needs of all individuals in need of literacy skills.

This research focused specifically on how transformative learning experiences impacted the intimate partner relationships of the women interviewed. Future research should be extended to include the impact of these transformations on other relationships, particularly with their children. It seems likely that the positive transformations the participants experienced also translated to improved parent-child relationships as well. The changes in the women were probably particularly important for daughters, but it would be interesting to explore whether the intervention led to different outcomes for boys and girls. Experimental designs aimed at addressing whether programs such as *MAS* and *Superando* produce more positive outcomes for children in comparison to other interventions that do not focus on empowerment of women and families are needed as well.

In general, more research is needed, that is designed to understand the full impact of transformative learning and family literacy. Longitudinal designs that follow families over time are needed in order to understand the long-term consequences of participation in family literacy programs which utilize transformative learning models in comparison to those that use a more traditional approach. Further, research studies

that include the husbands' perspectives are also needed as well. *MAS* recently added a fathers-only group to their program services. An evaluation of the impact of this group on family dynamics in comparison to family literacy programs that solely focus on serving the mothers is another area of research that I wish to explore.

Conclusions

Recent low income Mexican immigrant women face enormous challenges. The women in this study experienced feelings of isolation, fear, and depression upon arrival to this country. Through a progressive family literacy program aimed at facilitating transformative learning experiences in the lives of the participants, the women experienced dramatic changes in their lives. The women surmounted their feelings of isolation as they found a supportive community in *MAS* and *Superando*. Moreover, they overcame their fear, depression, and low self-esteem through critically assessing their previous assumptions and reaching deeper understandings of themselves. The women's personal transformations eventually manifested in changes with their husbands, resulting in improved marital relationships.

Most importantly, this research highlights the power of literacy to transform people's lives. At the core of this research is a story of resiliency and empowerment. The women's experiences remind us that one's social position does not have to define them. It is my hope that this research will provide a deeper understanding of the struggles and strengths of Mexican families living in the United States today. Further, I hope that these women's stories will encourage further research on this topic and generate excitement for more educators and practitioners to utilize transformative learning approaches with the populations they serve.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Participant Interview Protocol

I am a graduate student at Oregon State University and for my dissertation I would like to understand more about your experiences in *Superando*. The information you provide will help us understand what parts of the program work well for immigrant families, and what parts need to be improved or changed. I am also interested in learning about how the program has affected other aspects of your family and personal life. Participating in this interview is voluntary, and if you do not want to answer any or all questions you do not have to. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect the services you and your family receive from *Superando*. The information you give to me in the interview will be kept private and confidential. Your name will not be used on any reports, and your responses will be combined with others to provide summaries of the program. Do you have any questions before we start?

General Family and Program Participation

1. First, tell me a little bit about your family. How many children do you have, and what are their ages? Which ones are participating in *Superando*? Are there other family members that participate in *Superando*? If yes, do they participate on a regular basis, or for special events?

2. Now I'd like to know how you came to participate in a program like *Superando*. How did you first hear about it? What made you decide to start participating?

3. What keeps you participating in *Superando*?

Background Information

1. Now I'd like to hear about how you came to the United States. When did you move to the United States? Have you always lived in Oregon? What brought you to this part of the country?

2. Where in Mexico are you from? Tell me about what it is like there.

3. Let's talk about what growing up in Mexico was like. Can you tell me a story about an experience from your childhood that you remember really well? (Probe: Can you remember something really good that happened? What was your favorite holiday or family tradition?)

4. Tell me about a typical day for you and your family in Mexico. (Probe: What time did you wake up in the morning? What did you do once you wake up? Did you make breakfast? When did you eat lunch? What did you do in the evenings? What time did you go to bed? What did you do for fun?)

Life in the United States

Now I would like to focus on your life here in the United States.

1. Tell me about a typical day for you and your family. (What time do you wake up? What time do your children get up? Do you make breakfast? What do you eat? What do you do in the evenings? If they have a husband/partner, What time does your husband get up? Go to work? Get home… etc.)

    a. Does your husband help with household chores? If yes, what does he do?
    b. Has this changed since you moved from Mexico? Has he become more or less helpful? Why do you think that is?
    c. How do family decisions get made? Who makes them? (Examples: How to spend money or make major purchases. The decision to participate in *Superando*.)
    d. Whose decision was it to come to the United States?

2. How is your life different in the United States? How do your children's lives differ from the way you were raised? (Probe: educational opportunities, recreational activities, parenting style).

3. Some immigrants to the United States have an easier time than others adjusting to life in the United States. How easy or difficult has it been for you and your family?

4. Family literacy programs like *Superando*, can help families make an easier transition to life in the United States. Would you say this has been true for you? How do you think your life in Oregon would be different if you did not participate in *Superando*? (Probe: Do you know families that do not participate in a program like *Superando*? How are their experiences different or the same?)

Program Participation

Let's talk about your experiences in Superando.

1. *Superando* provides many services beyond the English classes, such as help with parenting and empowerment classes. Some people really like this aspect of the program, while others say they wish they could just focus on learning English. Tell me about your experiences with these program components. Do

you enjoy participating in these components (e.g. parenting classes, women's empowerment?)

2. Think back to when you began participating in *Superando*. How would you describe yourself before you came to *Superando*?

3. What about now? What are the most important ways that *Superando* has affected you as a person? (Probe: How has your thinking changed since you started *Superando*?)

4. Parenting is a really hard job, especially when children are young. Parents sometimes struggle with feelings of depression and low self-esteem. Was that a problem for you when you first started *Superando*? What about now?

    - What about parenting in a new country with different practices and customs? (Probe: Have you experienced any challenges parenting in the United States? Have you noticed any major differences in the way that children are raised here in comparison to Mexico?)

5. Sometimes parents find that participating in *Superando* can change relationships. Has participation in *Superando* changed anything in your relationship with your husband/partner? If so, how? (Probe: How does he feel about your participation? Has it made it difficult for you to participate? Has it improved your relationship with your husband/partner?)

6. Sometimes people also experience changes in other relationships with friends or family. Have you experienced any other relationship changes since participating in *Superando*? (Example: You no longer spend time with the same group of friends or your relationship with your parents or other relatives has improved).

7. Many times immigrants can feel very isolated when they first come to a new country. Was this true for you?

8. Has participating in *Superando* helped you feel less isolated? (Probe: Have you made new friends in *Superando*?

9. Programs aimed at assisting recent immigrants, such as *Superando*, have the best intentions, but do not always know the best ways to help in a culturally appropriate way. Can you think of any ways that *Superando* could be more helpful or sensitive to recent Mexican immigrants?

10. Finally, I have some summary questions about your experiences with *Superando*.

- What if any, are the most important ways that *Superando* has helped you as an individual?
- What if any, are the most important ways that *Superando* has helped your children?
- What if any, are the most important ways that *Superando* has helped your family as a whole?

18. Is there anything that we missed, or you would like to say about the program?

Appendix B

Protocolo De la Entrevista Del Participante

Soy una estudiante en la universidad de Oregon State University y para mi disertación quisiera entender mas sobre sus experiencias en *Superando*. La información que me provea nos ayudara ha entender que partes del programa funcionan bien, y que partes necesitan mejorar o cambiar. También estoy interesada en aprender como el programa ha afectado otros aspectos de su familia y vida personal. La participación en esta entrevista es voluntaria, y si no desea contestar una o cualquier pregunta no es necesario. Si usted decide no participar, no afectara los servicios que usted y su familia reciben de *Superando*. La información que usted me de durante la entrevista será mantenida privada y confidencial. Su nombre no será usado en ningún reporte, y sus respuestas serán combinadas con otras para así proveer un resumen del programa. ¿Tiene preguntas antes de que comencemos?

1. Primero, cuénteme un poco sobre su familia. ¿Cuantos hijos tiene, y cuales son sus edades? ¿Cuales de ellos participan en *Superando*? ¿Ahí otros miembros de su familia que participan en *Superando*? ¿Si, ellos participan regularmente o para eventos especiales?

2. Ahora me gustaría saber como vino a participar en un programa como *Superando*. ¿Cómo escucho primero sobre el programa? ¿Qué le hico decidir comenzar con el programa?

3. ¿Qué le hace seguir participando en *Superando*?

1. Ahora me gustaría escuchar de cómo vino a los estados unidos. ¿Cuando se mudo a los estados unidos? ¿Siempre ha vivido en oregon? ¿Que la trajo ha esta parte del país?

2. ¿De donde en México es usted? Dígame como es allí.

3. Vamos ha hablar sobre como fue crecer en México. ¿Me puede decir una historia sobre una experiencia que recuerde de su niñez? (¿Recuerda algo muy bueno que paso? ¿Cuál era su día de fiesta preferido o tradición familiar?)

4. Dígame de un día típico para usted y su familia en México. (¿A que hora se levantaban? ¿Qué hacían cuando se habían despertado? ¿Usted hacia el desayuno? ¿Cuando comían el almuerzo? ¿Que hacían por las tardes? ¿A que hora se acostaban para dormir? ¿Que hacia para divertirse?

1. Dígame de un día típico para usted y su familia. (¿A que hora se levanta? ¿A que hora se levantan sus niños? ¿Usted hace el desayuno? ¿Qué comen? ¿Qué hace por las

tardes? Si tiene pareja, ¿A que hora se levanta su esposo? ¿A que horas va a trabajar? ¿Llega a la casa?

a. ¿Su esposo le ayuda con los quehaceres de la casa? ¿Qué hace?

b. ¿Ha cambiado esto desde que llego de México? ¿Se ha convertido más o menos ayudador? ¿Por qué piensa que ha pasado esto?

c. ¿Cómo se hacen las decisiones familiares en su hogar? ¿Quién las hace? (Como gastar el dinero o hacer compras mayores. La decisión de participar en *Superando*.)

d. ¿De quien fue la decisión de venir a los estados unidos?

2. ¿Cómo es su vida diferente en los estados unidos? ¿Qué diferencia ve en la vida de sus hijos y la de usted? (Oportunidades educacionales, actividades de diversión, crianza.)

3. Algunos inmigrantes de los estados unidos tienen menos dificultad de ajustarse a la vida en los estados unidos. ¿Qué tan fácil o difícil ha sido para usted y su familia?

4. Programa como los de *Superando*, pueden a veces hacer la transición a la vida en los estados unidos más fácil. ¿Usted diría que esto es verdadero para usted? ¿Cómo cree que su vida en oregon seria diferente si usted no habría participado en *Superando*? (¿Conoce ha familias que no participen en el programa de *Superando*, como diferencian sus experiencias? ¿O, son iguales?)

1. *Superando* provee muchos servicios además de clases de ingles, así como ayuda con la crianza de sus hijos y clases de mejoría personal. Algunas personas les gusta mucho este aspecto del programa, mientras otros preferirían que el programa se enfocara en el aprender ingles. Dígame sobre sus experiencias con estas partes del programa. ¿Le gusta participar en estas partes del programa?

2. Piense atrás a cuando comenzó ha participar en el programa de *Superando*. ¿Come se describiría antes de venir a *Superando*?

3. ¿Y ahora? ¿Cuáles son las maneras más importantes que *Superando* le ha afectado a usted personalmente? (¿Cómo le ha cambiado su pensamiento desde que comenzó con *Superando*?)

4. La crianza de los hijos es muy difícil, especialmente cuando los niños están pequeños. A veces los padres luchan con sentimientos de depresión y piensan poco de si mismos. ¿Esto ha sido un problema para usted cuando empezó con Superando? ¿Y ahora?

Probe: ¿Que tal las costumbres de crianza en un país diferente y con diferentes practicas?

5. Hay veces que los padres encuentran que el participar en Superando puede cambiar relaciones. ¿La participación en Superando ha cambiado cualquier cosa en su relación con su pareja/esposo? ¿Si es así cómo? (Probe: ¿Cómo se siente él sobre su participación? ¿Ha hecho difícil para que usted participe? Ha mejorada su relación con su pareja/esposo?)

6. Hay veces que la gente también experimenta cambios en otras relaciones con los amigos o la familia. ¿Usted ha experimentado otros cambios en relacións desde su participación en Superando? (ejemplo: Usted ya no pasa mucho tiempo con el mismo grupo de amigos o su relación con sus padres u otros parientes ha mejorado).

7. Muchas veces los inmigrantes pueden sentirse muy aislados cuando primero vienen a un país nuevo. ¿Esto fue verdad para usted?

8. ¿Participando en Superando le ayudó ha sentirse menos aislada? (punta de prueba: ¿Usted ha hecho a nuevos amigos en Superando?

9. Los programas dirigidos ha asistir a inmigrantes recientes, tales como Superando, tienen las mejores intenciones, pero no siempre saben las mejores maneras de ayudar de una manera cultural apropiada. ¿Puede usted pensar en maneras que Superando podría ser más provechoso o sensible a los inmigrantes mexicanos recientes?

10. Finalmente, tengo algunas preguntas sumarias sobre sus experiencias con Superando.

- ¿Cuales son las maneras más importantes que Superando le ha ayudado como individua?
- ¿Cuales son las maneras más importantes que Superando ha ayudado a sus hijos?
- ¿Cuáles son las maneras más importantes que Superando ha ayudado a su familia en su totalidad?

11. ¿Hay alguna cosa que falto, o usted quisiera decir algo sobre el program?

Appendix C

Program Descriptions

The programs combined serve approximately 40 Spanish-speaking low-income families within the communities of Forest Grove, Cornelius and Hillsboro, Oregon. The programs both provide the integrated four-component Family Literacy model within a participatory framework. *Superando* offers classes in Forest Grove at the Catholic Church 25 hours a week during the day. *MAS* offers classes for 7 hours a week Tuesday through Thursday evenings. The programs share the parent educator and early childhood education teacher, but have different adult educators and infant and toddler teachers. Cheryl is the overall program coordinator for both sites, but she shares some of the responsibilities with Ramona who is the *Superando* site coordinator.

Both of the programs were in existence before receiving funding from Even Start in 2002. *MAS* was first established in 1992, as the *Gateway Family Literacy* program, in association with the Portland Community College Literacy center located in Hillsboro, Oregon. In their tenth year of providing intergenerational literacy services to Spanish-Speaking families they officially changed their name to *MAS,* which was a decision made by the participating families. In the fall of 2002 *MAS* began the West Washington County Family Literacy Collaborative with two of their partner programs, *Superando* and the *Home Instruction for Parents and Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY).* The three programs merged to write a grant for Even Start funding to enhance and expand their ability to provide family literacy services to low income Spanish-speaking families in their communities.

Superando is a non-profit organization that has served families since 1998. Prior to receiving Even Start funding, *Superando* provided holistic education, empowerment, and entrepreneurship training to low-income Latina women. The program included many of the core components of Even Start, but also included other services that continue today, including classes in art, sewing, culture, literature, and history.

Even Start funding has expanded the services offered, particularly for the children. Prior to Even Start funding, *Superando* provided childcare, but now they offer higher quality early childhood education services to infants, toddlers and preschool age children. In addition, *Superando* now provides parent education, and interactive literacy activities (ILA).

The program is in operation Monday through Friday for five hours a day, totaling twenty-five hours a week. *Superando* offers the most program hours in Oregon, far exceeding the state requirement of a minimum of nine hours a week of adult education and nine hours of parent education per month. In addition, to the time spent in the classroom, *Superando* participants commit themselves to volunteering for an organization within the community for a few hours each week.

The *Home Instruction for Parents and Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)* expanded their services as well in 2002 when it joined the collaboration and received Even Start funding. *HIPPY* provides home-based family literacy services to preschoolers and their parents. The Even Start funding allowed them to offer center-based, integrated four-component family literacy services. The center-based program was named *Mejorando Futuro* and offered family literacy services twelve hours a

week, four days a week. The program discontinued offering Even Start services (*Mejorando Futuro)* after the 2003-2004 program year, which was the second year of the program and collaboration.

MAS and *Superando* chose to continue with the collaboration and continue to provide family literacy services. The programs share the same philosophy about adult education and empowering Latina women and their families. The programs work together as a team, but also function separately. As formerly discussed, the programs are at two different sites and offer differing levels of intensity. The programs share the same parent educator and head preschool teacher.

Appendix D

Coding Scheme

Code	Description of Code
Motivation for Program Participation	Reasons why the participant decided to participate in the program and why they continue to participate in the program.
Crossing the Border	Discussion of the process of crossing the border to come to the United States.
Motivation to come to the U.S.	Any discussion of reasons why they chose to move to the U.S.
Adjusting to life in U.S. ***Subcode*** ***5. Mexico vs. U.S.***	Any discussion of expectations they had before coming to the U.S., experiences when they first moved to the U.S., how easy or difficult it has been for them adjusting to life the U.S. 1. *Any comparisons between life in the U.S. and Mexico.*
Childhood ***Subcodes*** ***5. Poverty*** ***6. Positive Memories*** ***7. Negative Memories*** ***8. Abusive***	Any description of the participant's childhood, not including their schooling or education history. • Descriptions of childhood characterized by poverty. • Describing childhood as mostly happy memories. • Describing childhood as mostly unhappy memories. • Any description of experiencing or witnessing abuse during respondent's childhood.
Education History	Any discussion of highest grade attained in school, any barriers they experienced in accessing educational opportunities, any discussion about
Education History (Cont.)	educational opportunities, any discussion about educational systems in Mexico, Any mention of their partner's educational experiences.

Adult Life in Mexico	Any mention of adult life while they still lived in Mexico. Including participant's daily routine, things they liked to do for fun, any general description of the town participant is from in Mexico.
Work History	Any discussion of participant's previous work experience in U.S. or Mexico.
Parenting ***Subcode*** ***1.Mexico vs. U.S. (Cultural Differences)***	Any discussion of the participant's parenting strategies, beliefs, values, challenges, strengths, etc. 4. Comparisons between parenting in Mexico versus the U.S. Any discussion of parenting values or strategies in relation to cultural differences.
Mental Health	Any discussion of the participant experiencing symptoms of depression, low self-esteem, or other descriptions of psychological well-being.
Marriage	General comments about the participant's marriage or relationship with their significant other, not including how the relationship has changed as a result of participating in the program.
Family of Origin	Any general discussion of the participant's relationship with their parents, aunts, uncles, and siblings not including relationship changes as a result of program participation.
Typical Day ***Subcodes*** ***1) Division of Household Labor*** ***2. Decision Making***	Any description of their daily life, daily routine/schedule, general comments about current life situation, household activities, family activities, and any activities they do outside of the program. 1) Description of household work that the participant, children, other family members, or husband are responsible for. 2) Any discussion of how family decisions are made, including the decision to move to the U.S.

Opportunities for children in the U.S.	Participant's perception of what opportunities are available or not available for their children in the U.S.
Perception of children's school performance	Participant's perception of how their child(ren) are performing in school.
Changes as a result of program participation ***Subcodes*** ***1. Children***	Any discussion of how program participation as changed their thinking or way of doing things in general, including descriptions of personal growth, educational advancement, progress towards personal goals, and reflections of how they perceived themselves before participating in the program and how they currently perceive themselves. 1. Description of child(ren)'s growth, behavioral changes, or academic achievement perceived by the participant as a result of the child's program participation.
2. Relationship with husband ***3. Relationship with friends*** ***4. Relationship with family as a whole*** ***5. Relationship changes with family or origin***	2. Any discussion of how the participant's relationship has changed with their significant other as a result of participating in the program. 3. Any discussion of how their relationship has changed with their friends as a result of participating in the program. 4. Discussion of how their immediate family unit has changed as a result of program participation. 5. Discussion of how their relationship with members of their family of origin has changes as a result of program participation.
Recommendations for program Changes	Discussion about whether or not they think any changes need to be made to the program design and services.
General Program Participation	General comments about program activities and program participation that do not include personal, relationship, or family changes as a result of participating in the program.
Future Goals	Any responses related to participant's future plans, goals, hopes, or desires for themselves, their children, significant other, or family as a whole.

Appendix E

Participants City of Origin in México

Legend: Houses = Participants' Home towns (Note: Eight participants came from the state of Michoacan, two of which came from small towns near Uruapan.)