

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Gabriela Polit for the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Anthropology presented on June 2, 2003.

Title: Self-Identity and Self-Esteem of Recent Female Mexican Migrants in an Even Start Program

Abstract approved:

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The purpose of the study is to explore the life experiences, identities, and self-esteem of a group of Mexican women who attend Even Start, a family literacy program. The study also focuses on the effect that the program has on the women's self-identities. I chose qualitative research considering I was interested in their phenomenological experience. In order to gather data I interviewed ten women, conducted a focus group with the women who were not interviewed, and did participant observation while the women were in class.

The Mexican women I interviewed came to this country hoping to improve their socioeconomic status. Most of them had relatives in the US and the support that they gave them made it easier for them to come and get established. As a result of being away from their people and their culture, they had a hard time, particularly at the beginning. Their illegal status and the fact that they didn't speak English complicated things even more. In spite of the many difficulties they had to face, their experiences in this country have allowed them to improve their socioeconomic situation and to achieve greater levels of independence.

In regards to their self-esteem, most of my informants have positive self-images. The few that have lower levels of self-esteem were often mistreated by caregivers and their families were dysfunctional in some way. Even though a few have lower levels of self-esteem, all my informants felt loved by their parents and other family members. Because of this and because they were raised in social environments that fostered interdependence, my informants have generally developed into responsible and reliable people who work towards their goals. Their identities mirror their society and in particular their social network. At the core of 'who they are' are traits of the identities of caregivers that through active choices (Blumstein 1991) they came to internalize.

Even Start plays a crucial role in their self-identities for two main reasons. First, in the program the women are taught English which is the basic tool they need in order to communicate and move around in this country. Second, the women are around people from their country. By feeling they belong to a larger community, the women feel supported and find strategies to cope with their reality. At the same time, being around other Mexicans strengthens their Hispanic identity.

The following are recommendations that could be used by Even Start to enhance the women's self-esteem. (1) Incorporate more one-on-one activities to enable students to learn at their own pace and to help participants with special needs to work without feeling a sense of pressure. (2) Provide the women with the opportunity to improve their literacy skills in Spanish and to strengthen their knowledge in basic areas. (3) Include activities that would allow the participants to release stress and thus to improve their ability to concentrate. (4) Provide the students with skills that will enable them to find jobs or get promoted.

Although the literature on self-identities was useful to conducting this research, the fact that scholars have approached the topic mainly from an intellectual perspective has resulted in an understanding of the self often disconnected from reality. Among the main contributions of this research is the realization that adult experiences such as migration and participation in a literacy program play a crucial role in people's self-esteem and identities.

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**Self-Identity and Self-Esteem of Recent Female Mexican Migrants
In an Even Start Program**

**by
Gabriela Polit**

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Gabriela Polit, Author

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SELF-IDENTITY AND SELF-ESTEEM OF RECENT FEMALE MEXICAN MIGRANTS IN AN EVEN START PROGRAM

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

I came from Ecuador to the US in September 2001 to study Anthropology at Oregon State University. On the winter break while in Portland, I went to Pioneer Square Mall to do some shopping. As a Latin American it struck me that all the janitors were Hispanic. I asked myself why only Latin Americans should be doing this type of job. I thought "There's nothing bad with cleaning but, if there's nothing bad with that, why are only Hispanics doing it? And why do not I see them in higher positions?"

Aside from the fact that all the janitors were Latin immigrants, the people at the mall behaved as if they were phantoms or robots designed to clean. No eye contact, no smiles, no thank-you's, no concern with leaving dirty spaces, no interest in who these people are, or what they think, or feel. Following the logic of the performance, I saw the janitors doing their job with stiff faces that avoided giving any sign of vulnerability. In an effort to extend some warmth to the woman that was cleaning my table, I shyly looked at her and waited for her to look back at me. However, she pretended nothing was happening and rapidly moved to clean the next table.

Aside from these experiences, in class I heard a student complain bitterly about Mexican immigrants taking up Americans' jobs, which of course, did not make a lot of sense. Hispanic immigrants were being resented for doing the kinds of things that people from other cultures and ethnicities were not willing to do. That, as well as the distance that I perceived between Latin workers and Americans, made me think I would like to contribute with my master's research to build a bridge of understanding between them.

I thought that one approach would be to explore their human side by giving answers to questions such as: What are their life histories? What brought them to the US? What have their experiences as migrants been like? How do they view themselves and what do their self-views and identities tell about Mexican culture? In an effort to make contact with Latin populations, I talked with different people who were engaged in projects to assist Hispanics. At some point I was introduced to Dee Curwen, an American woman who teaches English to Mexican immigrants. To make a long story short, Dee and Even Start, the program she works in, agreed that I would conduct research with her students.

Even Start is a federal literacy initiative that expands family literacy services to economically and educationally disadvantaged families with young children. In Corvallis, the program takes place at Lincoln Elementary School and serves Hispanic migrant families with limited English proficiency as well as in need of career development. The program funding lasts four years and because it serves people with low income, they are not required to pay. Although the program is open to Hispanics of both genders; the participants are currently all female and Mexican.

The Even Start personnel who work at Lincoln School in Corvallis were interested in documenting the role that the program has on the mothers' self-esteem and identities. I was interested in exploring more

broadly the participants' experiences, specifically culture, self-identities, and self-esteem, so that I could contribute to a better understanding of the Mexicans who cross the border. Considering that the program and I had interests in common, they enabled my research. Thanks to the informants' willingness to participate, the study was possible.

CHAPTER 11 LITERATURE REVIEW

Self and Identity

In the literature about the self and identity, there are as many definitions of these terms as authors that speak about them. Many use “self” and “identity” interchangeably. Most sociologists understand identity as linked to social roles and social positioning. To Blumstein (1991), it is the face that is socially displayed and that varies according to contexts, situations, and relationships. Different authors use the notion of self to refer to an individual’s internal universe which is product and, at the same time, mirror of social interaction. The self encompasses thoughts, feelings, emotions, and their behavioral manifestations.

Within the social sciences, a distinction is made between the sense of identity experienced by an individual versus the sense of identity experienced among members of a group or collectivity. According to Frieze (2002) “‘Self-identity’ or ‘personal identity’ is meant to characterize the consciousness a human being has of him or herself, of her continuity over time, and her conception of a certain coherence and boundedness of one’s own person” (2002, 1). On the other hand, ‘social identity’ or ‘collective identity’ refers to “conceptions of sameness or similarity with others” (2002, 1).

When speaking about the self, Rosaldo (1984, 145) affirms it is a cultural universal in the sense that all individuals are able to perceive the distinction, boundaries, or separateness between themselves and others. Frieze (2002) affirms that at the core of the concept of identity is the opposition and differentiation between the ‘I’ and the ‘other’, and in the case of collective identities, between the ‘we’ and the ‘them’. To Frieze, when stress is put on what distinguishes individuals or collectivities from one another, identities are strengthened (2002, 12).

When thinking about identities, it is useful to think about them in terms of time and space. In that sense, a person’s identity is the place at which an individual is at a given moment of his or her life. In terms of space I am referring particularly to roles and social positioning, where and who the individual is in relation to other people, and what kind of relationship bonds them. When I speak of roles, I use Smith-Lovin’s understanding of this term. She affirms that roles determine the relationships to others and they are basically expectations we have of others related to the positions occupied in ‘networks of relationships’ (Smith-Lovin 2002, 128).

One of the fundamental aspects of identities is their transience (Frieze 2002). In the same way that no one steps twice in the same river, we could say that no one has or displays exactly the same identity as time and space move. Precisely because the self is continuously changing, experiencing a sense of continuity is very often pointed to in the modern discourse as the aspect that gives balance and stability to the self. Several authors mention the human body as the primary means each individual has in creating a sense of continuity over time and space. People and social institutions also serve the function of reminding individuals of their sense of unity (Humphreys and Kashima 2002).

Identities are useful in many ways and serve different social purposes. Learning and knowing about each others' identity is basic in human interaction as they allow us to relate to other people in day to day contexts. Identities not only become apparent through speech; we can learn about others' identities just by looking at them. Gender, age, ethnicity, physical traits, and non-verbal behavior tell us a lot about an individual's identity (Robbins 1993). As soon as we have some basic information about who the 'other' is, we have a clue as to how to behave and what to expect from him or her as well as from the situation. In other words, by knowing the 'other's' identity we know which script to use, using Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical view of the self.

By knowing where we are positioned in the social landscape and having a sense of who we are, we are able to build relationships with others and in general to function and live in society. As we recognize people's roles and identities and as we encounter different social situations, we adapt to whatever the present circumstance is and enact the identity that best fits the moment. This does not necessarily mean that the self is hypocritical or unfaithful to its true nature. It simply means that, from a basic sense of internal unity and coherence, the self is able to adjust to different contexts.

Individuals define and shape their sense of self in relation to others' identities. The process of categorizing people and recognizing roles is also basic, so that individuals can enact context-based identities as much as keep shaping their own overall sense of self. Each person's position in society is related to and dependent on other individuals' identities. In other words, the definition of who we are depends to a great extent on who others are and on the types of relationships we have with one another. "Our social identities are constructed in large part by others who, by their behavior toward us, confirm that we occupy the spot on the landscape we claim to occupy", says Robbins (1993, 111). Sometimes groups or individuals, often in search of power, define their identity by degrading or oppressing their counterpart. An example of this is the oppression and violence exerted against women by men who feel the urge to define their sexual identity, and thus, who feel the need to publicly prove themselves as males.

Finally, peoples' similarities and differences are the basis for the construction of social codes and the crafting of social life. In all societies and cultures, aside from the personal attributes that distinguish individuals from one another, family relations, gender, and age are common criteria taken into consideration to differentiate individuals as well as to group them. Anthropologists have determined that kinship and family membership is one of the most important categories in the construction of identities and in a society's organization. It has been also found that in more traditional societies kinship relationships tend to be the axis around which individuals' identities are built.

As I stated, identities are context based. As individuals move from one social situation to another, as they grow older and adopt different roles in life, and as societies change individuals are constantly revising, evaluating, and modifying their sense of self. Speaking about identities, Gutmann (1996), an anthropologist who has focused on machismo and gender roles in Mexico, says that identities can neither be seen or understood in isolation, nor as fixed phenomena but they are always associated with other

identities and change according to the context and the individuals. “Masculinity, like other cultural identities, cannot be neatly confined in boxlike categories such as *macho* and *mandilon*. Identities make sense only in relation to other identities, and they are never firmly established for individuals or groups” (1996, 238).

Rites of passage are social mechanisms often used to communicate to other group members that an old identity, or an aspect of it, has been left in order to acquire a different identity or modify the previous one. A change in identity often entails becoming a member of a different group in society and acquiring different status and rights. As a result of anthropological research conducted in Chiapas, Mexico, Siverts (1993, 231) found that marriage was not only a “rite of passage for girls” but the exclusive way of becoming an adult in the eyes of others as much as in the eyes of the newly married individual. In the community Siverts studied, marriage entitled the individual to acquire social rights, like having land, and responsibilities --a woman could not go to her father to ask for money after she had married.

Most scholars (Mead 1934, Cooley 1902, Baldwin 1895, Stryker 1980, Blumstein 1991, Rosenberg 1979) agree that identities are a product of society and that, as such, they mirror social life. Through the study of identities it is possible to contribute to the understanding of individuals’ psychological processes, as much as to explore societies and their cultures. Being aware of the importance of the study of people’s identities, social scientists of all areas have devoted attention throughout decades to describe and understand identities and the self.

The relationship between self and society

The ideas of William James as well as those of the symbolic interactionists --Charles Cooley, James Baldwin, and especially the contribution of George Mead-- have been of paramount influence in the social sciences’ discussions about the self. The characteristics and paradoxes they identified in the self and its processes are still the foundation of existing theory.

James (1890) established a distinction between the ‘I-self’, the subject and knower, and the ‘me-self’, the object and known. He saw the self as multidimensional and hierarchical. According to James, the me-self is composed of a material self (the bodily self and one’s possessions), a social self (others’ opinions about one), and a spiritual self (the inner core that carries more enduring aspects of the self). James was the first to refer to the existence of multiple selves and of a unitary self. He posited that, on the one hand, selves are multiple depending on contexts; and, on the other hand, the self has a unitary character that is made possible because of temporal continuity.

The major focus of attention of the symbolic interactionists was on how relationships with others come to shape the self. Baldwin (1895), Cooley (1902), and Mead (1934) agreed that the self is a ‘social construction’ fashioned through symbolic, mainly linguistic, exchanges with others. In Cooley’s view, significant others play a major role in the self-concept an individual has. Cooley posited that one gages others’ opinions towards the self, and then, through internalization mechanisms, one incorporates those

opinions into one's sense of self. He noticed that what later become enduring attributes of the self are often what the individual has imagined that the others thought about him or her.

Baldwin (1897) posited that development of personality goes on with the modification of one's self as a result of others' opinions. In his view, the imitation of others' behavior is central in crafting the self (1897, 30). The relationship with alters, initially caregivers or family members, leads to the multiplicity of the self structure. He asserted the self varies across and within contexts; that is, the way individuals behave is context-based. It depends on aspects such as with whom they are, what type of circumstance it is, and how the others are behaving.

As a social psychologist, Mead (1934) argues that the social process is prior to the existence of the self. He sees the self fundamentally as a social and cognitive structure which emerges as the individual internalizes social processes of experience and behavior. For Mead, the internal dialogue or thinking process which takes place within the individual constitutes for Mead the essence of the self. He explains that when the attitude of the other becomes part of the individual's reflective process --that is, when one acts towards and speaks to oneself in the same way that others do-- the self arises (1934, 168). In Mead's view, talking and replying to ourselves as others respond to us, we become an object to ourselves.

Mead sees the self as an active organism within the social environment which adjusts to the situations in advance and reacts to them (1934, 182). The self is not so much a substance as a process and "this process does not exist for itself, but is simply a phase of the whole social organization of which the individual is a part" (1934, 178). Mead recognizes that although the individual reflects its community's structure, there is variability among individuals as each of them is positioned in a unique standpoint and has a "unique focus of relations" (1934, 202). With regard to the multiple selves and the unitary self paradox described by James (1890), Mead asserts that the many selves "constitute...the complete self" and "the unity and structure of the complete self reflects the unity and structure of the social process as a whole" (1934, 144).

The sociological perspective

In studying the self, sociologists have mainly paid attention to the link between society and the self. Drawing on the symbolic interactionists and particularly on Mead, a basic assumption among many social scientists is that the self reflects society; as a result, the self is multifaceted and mirrors its network of social contacts.

Symbolic interactionists assert that human beings engage in an active interpretation of meanings which are constructed through social interaction. Their assumption inspires the name of this school of thought. Kirkpatrick and White (1985) argue that people actively interpret what they live or experience and that interpretation is not independent of cultural coding. "Cultural models are used to reason about, evaluate, and manage social experience" (1985, 16). Rosenberg summarizes the common position held by sociologists for many years; their understanding of the self stresses on the self's social embeddedness.

Social factors play a major role in the...formation [of the self]...[It] arises out of social experience and interaction; it both incorporates and is influenced by the individual's location in the social structure; it is formed within institutional systems...; it is constructed from the materials of the culture; and it is affected by immediate social and environmental contexts. (1981, 593)

Throughout the last decades, several efforts have been devoted to understanding how the self arises and in general what processes take place within the self. In defining the self, social scientists and particularly sociologists and psychologists tend to do it in reference to three systems of categorization: cognition, affect, behavior, or a combination of them; structure and process; and degree of stability or mutability they attribute to the self (Howard 1991, 3).

Emphasis on the cognitive aspects of the self

Identity theory

According to Howard (1991, 8) identity theory is considered “the most prominent sociological theory of the relation of self and society.” Identity theory derives from the symbolic interactionist position which contends that the self is a product of society. To Stryker, Burke, and Serpe, main proponents of this theory, “identities are internalized role designations carrying the shared meanings and behavioral expectations associated with roles and group memberships; [on the other hand, the] self is a hierarchical ordering of identities, organized into a structure of salience” (Howard, 1991, 3). Both roles and identities have their opposites and relate somehow to their contraries, i.e., teacher-student, husband-wife, victim-aggressor. To Stone (1962) the meaning of an identity is determined by the shared aspects it has with those similarly situated and by the differences it has with those situated in counterpositions.

In identity theory, identities are formed in experience and activated in situations (Burke 1991, 205). Burke (1991) posits that individuals make choices and play an active role in their behavior and in the construction of their identity: “identities arise and are developed from the different social situations, contexts, and relationships we encounter, but they take on their own coherence and integrity and come to transcend the situations in which they arise” (1991, 189-190). Studies conducted by Burke show that people's self-meanings or identities are useful in helping to “select situations and activities that are congruent with those identities. Such congruency both displays who they are to others and affirms their own identity to themselves” (1991, 195).

Stryker (1980) attempted to reconcile the social, multifaceted structure of the self with its unitary structure in order to explain identity. He argues that the social structure requires individuals to play certain roles and thus, to occupy certain social positions. This gives place to varied, structured, and stable sources of the self. The unitary character of the self becomes apparent when individuals make active choices in order to recreate their identity based on the array of possible social patterns they are familiar with. Stryker (1980) maintains that a person has as many identities as network ties in which they play a role and occupy a social position.

Key for identity theory is the salience of certain identities over others or the presence of a given identity across a variety of situations. Rigeway and Smith-Lovin (1999) point out that several role identities --gender, race, class, and other transsituational identities-- operate simultaneously as opposed to having one salient identity guiding the individual's behavior. One of the advantages they highlight is that "events can be perceived and processed simultaneously from the point of view of multiple identities" (1999, 139).

Other understandings of self that draw on identity theory focus on the processual and reflexive development of self described by Mead. To Carley (1991), knowledge is a key component of the self and a link between self and society. She bases her assertion on the assumption that behavior is based on the information acquired through interaction, which can be direct "face-to-face exchanges" with an actual other, or indirect, interaction with a symbolic other through activities like watching a movie, reading a book or listening to the radio (1991, 97). She argues that as one interacts, one exchanges knowledge and one's self is shaped by that shared knowledge or by the information and ideas that are currently predominating within the self which anyway are a social product. As the self interacts, processes information, and readjusts itself, it constantly changes.

Along similar lines, Anzaldua (2003) says identities are not fixed categories but bits of information we carry. In her view, the many systems of information that determine our identities overlap with one another resulting in complex and integrated webs of knowledge. Except for the biological information that dwells in us through our DNA, the information that continuously shapes our selves is embedded in cultural frameworks.

The understanding of the self as continuous is central in the modern discourse about the self. Humphreys and Kashima (2002) argue that the possibility of experiencing a sense of continuity in one's life is made possible by memory processes. Individuals interpret life episodes "within the capacity and concepts accessible to the person at the time" and store them in memory (2002, 42). These episodes, along with their interpretation, can be retrieved to answer questions such as "Who am I?" or to determine 'what they are' and 'what they are not'.

According to Humphreys and Kashima, self-understanding is not steady or fixed. What one retrieves from memory when confronted with questions of self-identity depends on mood, background, context, and choice. Whatever is retrieved is at the same time contrasted with other information such as concepts of others. The authors assume that through these processes, persons build an understanding of who they are. In addition, social institutions, culture, and other social actors also play a significant role in creating in people a sense of unitary self by reminding the individual that s[he] is the same person as in the past.

Emphasis on the emotional aspects of the self

Cooley (1902) was the first to talk of the preeminence of sentiments in the configuration of the self; however, few have incorporated affect and emotion in theories of self. This could be seen as the preponderance that rationalism and positivism have in the western world. Rosaldo (1984) points out that feelings tend to be thought of as something personal, separated from culture. She sees personal narratives as the axis around which our feelings are organized. “Feelings are not substances to be discovered in our blood but social practices organized by stories that we both enact and tell. They are structured by our forms of understanding” (1984, 143).

Rosenberg (1991) talks about the close connection between emotion and cognition. To support his assertion, he refers to the process by which we control emotions through our thoughts, which are in turn the causes of our emotions (1991, 132). Drawing on Cooley’s ideas, Turner and Billings assert that affect precedes the cognitive aspect of the self. This explains why it is so complicated for people to “translate the vague sense of who they are into words” (1991, 103).

Research conducted by Turner and Billings (1991) shows the influence that emotions have on the self. Depending on what individuals feel, think, and expect with regard to their audience, they tend to experience their sense of self as more or less authentic. These authors studied college students to find out which social situations evoke feelings of authenticity and which feelings of inauthenticity. One of their major findings is that the self is able to have ““true-self”” experiences when individuals behave without feeling a sense of pressure.

According to Turner and Billings (1991), people feel authentic especially in situations that foster “relaxation, comfort, freedom from pressure and fitting in...freedom for self-expression... [as well as in situations where] altruistic behavior [is] fostered. They assert that the “true-self” tends to arise in challenging situations that “provid[e] an opportunity for achievement” (1991, 118). They found that ‘spurious-self experiences’ tend to take place “in situations that require one to maintain an appearance of being a certain kind of person” (1991, 118).

People experience their “true-self” in situations that free them from “occupational, age, or gender identities” (1991, 119). From this work, the assumption could be made that the same happens when people are in situations that free them from class, race, ethnicity, and in general, from bodily and external aspects of the self. The work of Turner and Billings reminds us of Goffman’s view of the self as performance and his observation that people’s behavior is shaped by their concern with their audience, as imagined or perceived by the individual (1959).

Emphasis on the behavioral aspects of the self

In addition to the emphasis on the cognitive aspects of the self, Piliavin (2002) suggests the self includes habits which may have been conscious at some point, but with time have become part of unconscious behavior. In her view, habits give a sense of stability to the self and take place due to social

situations that are experienced in a repetitive fashion. Commenting on Piliavin's work, Howard (2002, 11) asserts that habits function as a scripted behavior allowing the individuals to make use of previous knowledge acquired, without having to come up with a full set of information each time they interact or find themselves in a given role or situation.

Blumstein's (1991) interest is in how selves are shaped through interaction; particularly, he focuses on how intimate relationships have long-lasting implications for the self (1991, 308). Blumstein understands the self as "a personal intrapsychic structure" which motivates behavior and is "only knowable by the person to whom it belongs." Blumstein uses the term "identity" to refer to the "face that is publicly displayed" as the individual interacts. The individual's behavior invokes a response in the other, that response contains information relevant to the self, and that information may ultimately modify the self. To Blumstein, identities, roles --and the scripts that come with them-- as well as structures of intimacy, shape the selves (1991, 306). In his view, sometimes identities reveal the self or are expressions of it, and some times they are not.

Blumstein's central assertion is that if the individual projects a certain identity over and over, that identity will most likely modify the self; in other words, the self and the identity will fuse together (1991, 307). He calls this very slow and gradual process *ossification* and focuses on interpersonal relations to explain how and why identities ossify into selves. He points out that continuity in the interpersonal environment is a condition for "ossification." To support his contention he argues that in intimate relationships, a common reality is constructed and the selves are continually modified to support the bond and reach consensus. Thus, the characteristics of intimate relationships create the appropriate environment for "ossification" to take place.

The self as 'performer'

In order to explain how we present ourselves and appear to others in social situations, Goffman (1959) takes a dramaturgical approach. He argues that because individuals want to control the way in which others see and treat them and because they want to evoke a certain response in their audience, they behave in a certain way. As individuals interact, the things they do, consciously and unconsciously, contribute to defining the social situation for both them and their audience. This means that, based on the individual's words and actions, the audience defines what kind of person the individual is, what they can expect of her/him, what he/she expects from them, and so on. Social roles also lead people to create a certain impression in others. Other times, the motivations for the performance have to do with socio-cultural norms or status requirements.

Goffman describes social interactions as a dynamic performance where 'actors' are engaged in impression management to maintain appearances and "to sustain a definition of the situation that has been projected before others" (1959, 239). The self is 'a product of a scene' and in that sense, the self is subject to 'the whole scene of his action'. Expanding the theatrical metaphor, Goffman speaks of "front region",

“where performance is presented”, and “back region”, “where performance is prepared”, and thus, where access of others is controlled (1959, 238). (I would argue that even when the self is performing, the uniqueness of the self is exposed as well as the particular social and cultural perspective of the individual and no mask or performance can erase this.)

The concept of self that Goffman holds, specifically of the “performed self”, seems to be closer to what some authors call identity because it is public, and has to do with social expectations. To this sociologist, “the self...as a performed character...is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited” (1959, 253). Because what people present to others is a mask, he suggests we cannot take performances too seriously. He asserts that what helps create a balance between the illusion and reality of social interactions is people’s unconscious behavior which often contradicts the performance or the meanings the ‘performer’ wants to convey to his/her audience.

Along the same lines of Goffman, Baldwin (1992) drawing on symbolic interactionists, finds that the self is experienced in relation to some audiences: people who are present or imagined, specific or generalized, actual or fantasized. Hermans (2002) as well refers to many studies that have shown that the behavior and responses of the self as it interacts are conditioned to a great extent by the audience; and, more precisely, by what the individual thinks the audience expects.

The dialogical self

Based on monologue-dialogue dichotomy, Bakhtin (1973) explores the concepts “monologic” and “dialogic.” The former term means single, correct, authoritative whereas ‘dialogic’ refers to the enriching processes of disagreement that result from the discussion of differently positioned subjects. Along Mead’s lines but particularly drawing on Bakhtin, Hermans (2002, 71) understands the self as the process and continually changing result of an intensive interchange of views and positions within the individual as well as between him/her and others.

Considering that people live in communities and share a common past and present, Hermans asserts that the self speaks “not only as an individual voice but also as a collective voice, reflecting collective values” (2002, 96). He points out how in English, the use of the pronoun “I” contributes to create the illusion of the existence of a unified self where the “I” is separated from other people and situations (Hermans 2002, 75-76). Accordingly, there are other languages that offer other structures that allow perceiving the self as integrated to the other members of its community as well as to different aspects of reality.

Hermans draws on James’ I-Me distinction and on the polyphonic character of Dostoyevsky’s novels, noted by Bakhtin (1973), to explain the self as constructed by multiple voices that agree and disagree in a dialogical way. The voices within come from different positions, views, worlds, and consciousnesses that correspond to the voices of real, imagined, and fantasized people. These voices are

“ideologically authoritative”, autonomous, and independent and their interaction creates a complex and dynamic organization of the self. Hermans stresses the active role of the self as it compares, contrasts, incorporates, adjusts, and reformulates his/her own self and discourse through a dialogue that takes place between the “I” and the “me.” This dialogue represents the many voices, scripts, positions, and ideological perspectives of others as perceived, imagined, and [or] fantasized by the self.

Because the self is continually being re-created, Hermans uses the terms “position” and “positioning” and finds them more appropriate contrasted to the term ‘role’ which in his view connotes something static (2002, 82). Some examples of positions, what other authors refer to as roles, he provides are the child, the victim, the fighter, the recognition seeker, the critic, the aggressive figure (2002, 88). He notes that positions occupy space both in the inside (mental space) and the outside world. There are positions that remain in the background of our self, others are in the front, others get awakened before a certain stimulus; some are potential (i.e., mother, grandmother) and some are unaware.

Along Goffmans’ same lines, Hermans says the circumstances and needs that arise as one lives determine the salience of positions and the movement of positions from the back to the front stage. Cultural changes also determine the movement of positions in the self-system. He suggests that in the midst of a rapidly changing world, the self searches for stable positions that provide a sense of consistency (2002, 86). The transformations that take place within the individual as the self adjusts to changes are always mediated by dialogic forms. Hermans stresses that contradictions, conflicts, disagreements between internal and external positions play a crucial role as they give place to self-innovation; thus, they are signs of a “well-functioning self in general” and should be seen as common aspects of the self (2002, 95).

Self-Esteem

Throughout this thesis “self-esteem”, “self-views”, and “self-images” are used interchangeably. The concept of self-esteem has as foundation the understanding that what people think or say about themselves is charged with the evaluation process typical of human thought and inherent in any self-description (Harter 1999, 4-5). In other words, whatever we say about ourselves entails a conscious or unconscious, and a positive or negative judgment. For instance, the statement “I like my hair” carries within it an implicit evaluation: “it is pretty”, “it is healthy”, and so on.

A contemporary approach holds that self-worth varies across situations and contexts. According to Harter, global self-evaluations have focused on “the overall evaluation of one’s worth or value as a person” (1999, 5). Psychologists give special importance to the distinction between self-evaluations that represent global characteristics of the individual and those that refer to the individual’s sense of agency across specific domains, i.e. cognitive, social, and physical (Harter, 1999, 5). Global self-evaluations are not the product of domain specific self-evaluations; “this general evaluation is tapped by its own set of items that explicitly ask about one’s perceived worth as person” (1999, 5). Drawing from William James (1892), Harter posits that global self-worth depends on the sense of competence that individuals experience

in areas considered relevant by them. The perception of competence in domains seen as important by individuals is a powerful predictor of self worth (1999, 167). The converse takes place as well; people with a high level of self worth tend to perceive themselves as competent in those areas that are relevant to them.

In general, socialization experiences have an impact on people's self-understanding and self-evaluation. Social interaction and culture determine what we think about ourselves and how we judge ourselves (Harter 1999, 10). In addition to incorporating significant others' opinions to construct our sense of self, we internalize social values and standards and these play as well a crucial role in our self-esteem (1999, 13). It has been shown through research that self-evaluations depend to a great extent on the quality of care and love that people were provided during their childhood as much as on the specific childrearing practices of caregivers (1999, 167). This consideration has its roots in what symbolic interactionists, Baldwin, Cooley, and Mead, argued. They stated that the self is built upon 'linguistic exchanges' or 'symbolic interactions' with others, particularly caregivers.

Based on the work of James, Cooley, Baldwin, and Mead, as well as on psychological research, Harter developed a model which identifies aspects within the self processes that enable, determine, and predict the level of self-esteem individuals have in a particular moment. In her research with children and adolescents, Harter found that both competence in domains deemed as important by individuals, as well as the approval they get from significant others lead to self-worth (1999, 198). As a consequence of the resulting self-worth, the individual displays a certain mood which can vary within a continuum from depressed to cheerful. Parallel to mood, people experience a degree of hope (from hopeless to hopeful). Low self-esteem can lead to depression and hopelessness about the future (1999, 227). "Hopelessness is typically defined as the perception that one is unable to control or alter painful life circumstances" (1999, 200).

As mentioned before, Cooley (1902) argued that individuals are concerned with what significant others think about them and with whether they approve or disapprove of them. People's concern with what others think about them becomes the basis of self-worth. Harter affirms that the opposite may also take place; that is, the level of self-worth a person has determines the perceptions of others' opinions about them. Feeling or perceiving approval from others is tightly related to self-worth, considering that self-worth has to do with self-approval (1902, 193). However, those who are overly concerned with what others think of them put their self-worth at risk (1902, 194).

To Harter, James' and Cooley's considerations about what makes the foundation of self-worth help explain the level of self-worth someone has (1999, 168). Her findings suggest that individuals with lower self-esteem perceive themselves as incompetent in specific domains and perceive lower levels of support from significant others, whereas individuals who perceive higher levels of support from significant others tend to enjoy higher levels of self-worth (1999, 175). Different studies have shown that in most cases, what one believes to be others' opinions about oneself is generally different from what others actually think.

Harter refers to the fact that in the West, people tend to be extremely concerned with the self and particularly with what others think about them. The array of intellectual work that speaks of the self and how to increase self-esteem is proof of this concern. She refers to the Buddhist viewpoint which sees the self image as an illusion and a creation of the mind that impedes us from seeing our true and essential spiritual nature. Because the self-image is based on how we wish we were, on what we fear we are, or how we would like the world to see us, followers of Buddhist philosophy consider that the intellectualization around our self-concept prevents us from seeing our true and spiritual selves clearly. Harter links this perspective with her finding that people who are less concerned with the opinions of others accomplish more and do better (1999, 189).

Social researchers found it was not always effective to increase individuals' self-esteem. Many even agreed that instead of raising people's self-esteem, what should be the aim is to provide individuals with opportunities to know and evaluate themselves as objectively as possible. There has also been a sustained discussion as to which are the appropriate paths to build healthy self-evaluations. According to Twenge and Baumeister (2002), most research suggests that rather than increasing self-esteem, it is convenient to cultivate self-control. Self-control (colloquially referred as will-power) is defined by the authors as "the human capacity to alter or override one's natural responses, including thoughts, emotions, and actions" (Twenge and Baumeister 2002, 57). By using self-control one may work towards long term goals, resist temptations, show tolerance, have healthier relationships and habits, and so on. It has been shown that outcomes lead to self-esteem rather than self-esteem producing outcomes. To these authors, higher self-control brings positive outcomes such as "better task performance, better interpersonal relationships, and better mental and emotional health" (2002, 68).

Self-esteem as a motivation

Gecas (1991) uses a different approach to explain self-esteem. He argues that as the self develops, motivation becomes an important aspect of it. When individuals have a self-concept, they engage in what he calls "self-motives" or "motivations" and these include (1) maintaining and enhancing their self concept (self-esteem), (2) seeing it as "efficacious and consequential" (self-efficacy), and "experienc[ing] it as meaningful and real" (authenticity) (1991, 174). The self feels motivated to attain or increase self-esteem, self-efficacy, and authenticity and at the same time it tries to avoid falling into the opposite sides of the continuum. In addition, societies tend to have mechanisms that prevent individuals from going to extremes. This is probably why attributes such as humility and modesty are appreciated in different cultures.

Gecas describes the self-esteem motive in these terms: "the motivation to view oneself favorably and to act in such a way as to maintain (protect) or increase a favorable evaluation of oneself" (1991, 174). The undesirable conditions which individuals try to avoid in relation to self-esteem are depression as well as feelings of worthlessness, and self-contempt (1991, 175). Self-esteem is generally connected with the interpersonal domain and not so much with macro-sociostructural aspects such as race and social class. His

contention is based on results obtained by research on social stratification and self-esteem. Blacks on the one hand and lower-class whites, on the other hand, showed very slightly lower self-esteem respectively compared to whites and middle-class people (1991, 180). Commonly, this has been explained by the belief that self-esteem is mainly tied to interpersonal relations.

Unlike self-esteem, self-efficacy is related to the sociostructural domain and has to do with a sense of internal and external control. In general, people who occupy a higher position in society tend to experience a greater sense of self-efficacy. Marx's critique of capitalism addresses the alienation that not being in control of "means of production" evokes in the dispossessed. To Gecas, authenticity is related to the cultural domain and has to do with commitment to ideologies and identities (1991, 180). The positive end of the authenticity continuum may take undesirable forms such as "intolerance of different belief and value systems" (1991, 178). That is why some ambivalence and uncertainty are necessary.

These three aspects of the self (self-esteem, authenticity, and self-efficacy) are interdependent and usually one prevails over others. Gecas contends that both self-efficacy and authenticity are necessary to maintain and build positive self-esteem. In turn, self-esteem allows individuals to experience feelings of efficacy and authenticity. The self-esteem motive often prevails over the other motivations. Based on research findings, people tend to deny their responsibility when outcomes are negative, saving face and favoring their self-esteem motive (1991, 175).

Talking about social change, Gecas suggests that to overcome people's sense of inferiority, it is necessary to increase their sense of efficacy and worth by finding the source of the problems in social factors. His assertion is based on findings that show that people who tend to assume responsibility for events and circumstances and who are not able to see the external components (social, cultural, structural) involved in conflicts, tend to have low self-esteem. Based on research results, Gecas concludes that where there is deprivation of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and/or authenticity, there can be social unbalance as much as a receptive environment and great potential for social change (1991, 182).

Individualism, collectivism, and the self

Among social scientists, a common way of categorizing societies was to determine whether they were individualistic or collectivistic. Andersen (1993), based on a broad literature review, understands cultural differences as a result of the fact that some cultures tend to be individualistic while others collectivistic. This dimension determines the way people live as well as their values and behavior. Within this tendency, cultures such as the American and the European were typically seen as individualistic whereas most Latin American, Asian, African, and Arab cultures were among the ones deemed collectivistic.

Establishing dichotomies in the effort to describe societies and cultures has been seriously challenged and questioned as well. Although individualism is still often seen as a common feature found in modern societies, social research and cultural studies are more careful in order not to fall into simplistic

and extremist descriptions. There are differing points of view with regard to individualism, modernity, and American culture.

In his book *Essays on Individualism*, Dumont (1986) establishes a contrast between modernity and non-modernity. One of his main ideas is that individualism is a central aspect of modern societies and thus is reflected in almost every aspect of those societies. To exemplify, he argues that, for instance, liberalism is the socioeconomic expression of individualism. Even the terms “nation” and “nationalism” are linked to individualism “as a value.” He defines a nation as “... a global society composed of people who think of themselves as individuals” (1986, 10).

Dumont does not fall into extremes. To him, the modern or developed world is a fusion of opposites: modernity and non-modernity, individualism and non-individualism. The following are the major aspects of modern culture:

1. Science is of paramount importance; rationality is the means to find the “truth.” “Modern society wants to be “rational,” to break away from nature and set up an autonomous human order” (1986, 244). People want to think they can, and constantly try, to control, transform, and subdue nature, and science is one of the main means (1986, 261).
2. The stress is on the individual who is seen as separated from nature. Modern societies focus on the relationship between humans and objects (Think of the preeminence of the media and the market) and not humans with humans.
3. Morality is a personal issue, distinct from religion.

Dumont posits that modern thinking looks for order. It segments reality, disconnects the parts from the whole, and stresses on dichotomies. The non-modern way of thinking goes with the chaos of reality, it stresses interconnections, fluidity, wholeness, structure, and context (1986, 253).

Taking a different path, Hall (1983) reaches similar conclusions. Through the anthropological study of cultures’ relationship to time, he concludes that order and segmentation are common among people from “monochronic” cultures. These are societies whose people understand time as linear and thus tend to do one thing at a time. “Monochronic” people tend to be task-oriented and to organize their lives through schedules and appointments. A tendency towards fluidity and integration of elements is typically found in “polychronic” cultures. “Polychronic” people have a circular understanding of time and thus, tend to do several things at a time. Family and social interaction tend to be central in their lives. Because of this, changing plans at the last minute to give priority to social life is accepted. American and European are “monochronic” and Arabs and Latin Americans are examples of “polychronic” cultures.

In his study of the identity of people from India and Japan, Roland (1988) focuses on three major organizations of the self which he came up with as a result of his cross-cultural experience: the “familial self”, the “individualized self”, and the “spiritual self.” In each culture one of these selves is predominant. In societies such as Latin America, which is a relationship-centered culture, the “familial self” is salient. In

the US, due to the focus on autonomy and independence, Roland finds that the “individualized” self predominates.

In *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah (1985) and his colleagues examine the way Americans think about themselves. After conducting extensive fieldwork, they found that most Americans share a “common moral vocabulary” that is characterized by individualism (1985, 20). The authors call this “the first language” in contrast to “second languages” or non-individualistic ways of speaking, thinking, and behaving. To these social scientists, Americans’ belief in success as the result of free and fair competition among individuals in an open market is probably one of the central driving forces in encouraging people to be independent.

Work is very close to Americans’ sense of self; “what we ‘do’ often translates to what we ‘are’” (1985, 66). Americans tend to think that people deserve whatever they have worked for. In the same way, whatever Americans accomplish or possess becomes, in their eyes, legitimated by a sense of individualism that highlights personal effort. Bellah and his colleagues affirm that the emphasis on autonomy and self-reliance leads Americans in many cases not to feel responsible for others, often, not even family members. They found in their study that Americans tend not to see how they depend on social, cultural, and institutional contexts (1985, 84); what becomes salient for them are their own achievements or what they think of as their own. In spite of the centrality that Bellah and his co-authors found individualism has on Americans’ lives, one of the main conclusions they reach is that the way in which Americans express themselves makes them appear more isolated and individualistic than what they actually are.

Rosenberger (1992) is also critical in her view of Americans conception of the self: “people are not accumulations of experiences and achievements in a linear line of progression toward self-fulfillment as Americans prefer to think” (1992, 72). However, after devoting several years exploring the sense of self of Japanese women, she asserts that Americans’ self cannot be simplistically categorized as separate and individualized; “everyday experience challenges that notion” (1992, 89-90). The collective self of Japanese versus the individualistic self of Americans are both myths. To her “...every society gives space for both the collective and the personal, the differences being matters of degree and emphasis” (1992, 4). To challenge the conception that being individualistic is all negative, Rosenberger mentions some of the positive aspects of individualism: “expressive personal feeling...autonomy... non-conformity, creative initiative, achievement, assertiveness, rights, and opinions...self reliance, self-discipline, perseverance, endurance...” (2001, 5).

Tradition, Modernity, and Self-Identity

In this thesis, the word “modernity” indicates the practices and effects of industrialization and the industrialized world. As central dimensions it includes industrialism, capitalism, and the sociocultural phenomena that derive from them (Giddens 1991, 14-15). Ong (1997) assumes modernity can happen

everywhere in the world. To her, modernity involves certain processes of imagination and practices that accompany historical, political, and economic changes (1997, 171). When she speaks of imagination, she considers people's relationships to knowledge power systems as well as a sense of belonging to specific communities from which people take off to imagine possibilities for self.

In his analysis of *Modernity and Self-identity* contributes to the understanding of modernity as well as discussing basic ideas about the self. Tradition brings with it norms and habits. In that sense it is central in maintaining a culture, as it is, throughout generations (1991, 145). However, tradition is fading away as people, ideas, and options from elsewhere travel all around. While the tendency is for traditions to become extinct, we are continuously witnessing dances, tensions, and all sorts of fusions between tradition and modernity as well as between the local and the global. To a great extent, what allows this encounter between modernity and non-modernity to take place is, according to Giddens, the social, economical, and cultural movement brought by migration, the media, and technology.

While tradition brings along stability, modernity brings choices with it. Traditional societies are characterized by the interdependence and close bonds between kinship. Partly because of traditions in non-modern societies, the self is more consistent (1991, 48). In modern societies individual choices are fostered, and doubt is a strong component due to the multiple options available in terms of lifestyle and commodities. In modernity, social life is characterized by impersonality; often people feel lonely and unprotected.

To counterbalance the fact that close social bonds are not a part of modern life, Giddens argues that modernity is characterized by the search of intimacy and committed relationships in sexuality, marriage, and friendship. The stress put on independence and autonomy at all levels of human reality (material, socio-cultural, moral, and spiritual) is leading self-identity to become increasingly "internally referential" as opposed to "socially referential."

According to Giddens, the decisions one makes, from the smallest to the biggest, continuously determine one's identity (1991, 81). Of course, not all options are there for everyone; choices are limited and depend on socio-economic circumstances. Rosenberger (2001) stresses on the constraints that come along with modernity when she refers to the economic and social changes that Japanese society has gone through: "Whereas before people lacked individual power to alter social and kinship situations, now people lack power in the face of media and the market" (2001, 234).

Routine is a central part of the relative sense of security that modernity offers. Giddens (1991, 167) points out that people are generally engaged in 'overwhelming' routines. Stability, routine, and repetition are maintained through 'capitalistic production and distribution' (1991, 5). Capitalism guarantees the growth of inequality and this has quite an impact on the self. Lack of enthusiasm about life or 'personal meaninglessness' is characteristic of modernity as deep human needs, such as nutrition, spirituality, nature, and social connectedness, are denied.

As Dumont and several authors point out, Giddens also finds that another characteristic of modernity is that nature is subdued and social control and organization are pervasive (1991, 166). People

live in cities while natural areas are manipulated, exploited, and often destroyed. People are so distanced from nature that they have to arrange sporadic trips during holidays and vacations in order to have some contact with the wilderness. This estrangement has an effect on the self as much as on the social and natural environment. Unfortunately, the self, seeing itself separate from nature, tends to act accordingly.

Giddens sees the self as a reflexive project shaped and re-shaped through 'biographical narratives' (1991, 5). Self-identity is "what the individual is conscious of"; it is "the result of the continuous self-reflection process" (1991, 52). The flow of information and knowledge, which is gradually more and more global, is one of the aspects that demands reflexivity and constant revision of self and identity. The "ideal self" is central as it allows the individual to organize its autobiography and give direction to its identity (1991, 68). Body and autobiography give a strong sense of continuity to the self over time and space (1991, 100). Giddens acknowledges the importance of the body in terms of the goals and reflexivity of the self that takes place in modernity. As one makes choices and gets information in relation to one's own body, for instance in terms of health, nutrition, and appearance, Giddens argues people are more likely to assume responsibility for it.

Anthropological research conducted by Rosenberger (2001) with regard to changes experienced by Japanese women as they and their society move towards modernity corroborate many of the points stressed by Giddens. Her work contributes to the understanding of the conflicts that arise in the encounter of modernity and tradition. In her study of how the notion of the self has changed among Japanese women from the 70's to the 90's, Rosenberger highlights the tensions created between global trends, such as becoming more independent and devoting more time, attention, and money to leisure activities; and the more traditional, group-oriented behavior of past generations that stresses on women's virtue and self-sacrifice for others and the nation's sake.

Appadurai (1997) reflects particularly on the centrality of electronic media and migration in modernity and on the effects that this phenomena have on self-identity. It is his view that, mass migration and electronic communication are the major means which contribute to create this intense movement that is rapidly shaping the world. Selves are nowadays crafted in an unstable world characterized by intense movement of people, feelings, cash, and ideas. Mainly through electronic communication and migration he argues that globalization travels, encouraging people to incorporate globalization into their own version and habits of modernity (1997, 4).

Electronic media is in itself global considering that almost all of it is influenced by media from other places. Appadurai posits that electronic media is one of the main sources for the creation and re-creation of ideal, unreal, imagined selves (1997, 3-4). Electronic media as one of the resources that shows us the 'possible lives' we can live, and the possible selves we can be. In this process imagination plays a big role. The difference between now and the past is that because of the media, people's imagination is nowadays intensively stimulated. Because the media has invaded our lives or because we have let it do it, our imagination somehow belongs to the system and has acquired a more homogenous character. Our

imagination, our thoughts, actions and sense of self are now somehow limited, influenced and framed by what we perceive through the media.

Imagination has acquired a collective character according to Appadurai because the “media make[s] possible ...to imagine and feel things together” (1997, 8). The media also allows people to have collective experiences. Think about the fact that we receive every piece of news already filtered through the eyes of the media. The printed media is also central in the imagination and creation of nations and national identities (1997, 22). This point is also discussed by Guttman (1996) when he mentions that Octavio Paz, along with other Mexican intellectuals, contributed to the creation of the Mexican identity with his writings. Guttman argues that Paz strengthened a national identity linked to machismo with his writings and the intellectual discussions that his ideas originated (Guttman 1996, 226).

Appadurai says modernity and globalization are not everywhere and have not reached everyone. In spite of the fast pace with which American culture and market expand around the world, to Appadurai, globalization is not homogenization or Americanization (1997, 17). He stresses the active role that individuals and societies play as they are exposed to global products and ways of living and being. People select what they want or what interests or serves them and incorporate it in their own way and style to their culture.

Mexican Identity

As a result of the Spanish conquest, most of the multiple indigenous groups who inhabited America mixed racially and culturally with their dominators. Later on, Africans were brought and although they were considered to be at the lowest level in the social scale, indigenous peoples, Spanish, and “mestizos” mixed with Blacks as well. Throughout centuries, the Spanish, the African, and the indigenous cultures have influenced each other resulting in a rich cultural and ethnic variety. Both the particularities of the different native groups that inhabited Latin America as well as the environmental and geographical conditions have played a fundamental role in giving Hispanic societies distinctive qualities.

From the 1930's, anthropologists who studied cultures of Hispanic America started using the notion of “acculturation” as a theoretical framework to explain cultural aspects related with the historical periods that followed the conquest. “Acculturation” focuses on “the process and results of the contact of [people of different] cultures” and posits that typically one group tends to hold a greater share of power (Foster 1995, 23). As a result, the group that changes the most is the dominated. In the case of Latin Americans, the acculturation process did not end when the Spanish colonies became independent. A drastic and violent process of acculturation started with the Spanish and then continued subtly and indirectly under the influence of other countries.

Since the Spanish conquest, racial stereotypes have been central in determining Latin Americans' position in the social scale. The majority of Latinos are *mestizos*, which means they are the product of mixed parentage, and thus have African, European, and indigenous background and features. However,

because for centuries African and indigenous peoples were treated and regarded as if they were inferior, people whose European features are salient tend to deny the presence of the other ethnicities in their background. In turn, those whose physical appearance clearly reveals African and/or indigenous ethnicities, tend to be victims of discriminatory practices. In this sense, racial segregation has shaped, in one way or another, the collective and individual identity of Latin Americans.

Taking into account the historical and cultural background of most Latin Americans, it becomes easier to understand why Octavio Paz (1995) mentions distrust as one of Mexicans most notable characteristics. Paz finds the roots of distrust in past and present circumstances. As suggested before, racial exploitation and discrimination dominated the period under the Spanish rule, while in the present the vast majority of the population experiences lack of power in the face of a market economy that privileges a rich minority and a system that fosters corruption as a means to survive. The contempt with which people of color have been historically treated explains as well why Paz says Mexicans tend to feel shameful of their ethnicity (1995, 148).

Associated with Mexicans' distrust is their concern with privacy. Paz says they constantly protect and cover their inner selves, Mexicans, as other Latin Americans, tend to suggest instead of saying things directly and often resort to irony. According to Paz, lying is often a mechanism used by Mexicans to protect themselves. Paz says their lies reflect what they do not have, what they are not and what they would like to be (1995, 176). Even though a lot goes on inside of them in terms of thoughts and feelings, Paz asserts the façade they show is often rude and stiff (1995, 185). With all these attitudes Paz says Mexicans are basically *cerrados* or closed.

Both from the indigenous peoples and from the Spanish, Mexicans inherited their concern and passion for forms; this probably explains why Mexicans tend to stick to traditions, says Paz (1995, 167). Life in Mexico is characterized by formality as much as it is centered on rituals, parties, and big public events. People love to get together and any reason is a good reason to do it. In the case of poor and lower class people who are not used to going on vacations or relaxing during the weekends, the big annual parties compensate their year-round effort (1995, 184). As it tends to happen in societies where chances of upward mobility are very low, in the case of Mexicans, the party is like a bubble bursting. It allows all the energy, and often the violence that has been silenced, repressed, and controlled, to come out. Festivities in Mexico also serve the function, at least momentarily, of integrating people of different socioeconomic status, and in that sense they bring social and individual relief. Finally, parties allow there to be a balance between social constraints and individual needs.

In a society extremely concerned with forms and traditions there is little space for authenticity. In order to protect themselves, Mexicans usually wear a mask of politeness and they tend to be silent and introverted (1995, 537). Paz says that only when they are alone they dare be themselves (1995, 208). I would argue that in the case of women, being authentic is even harder because of what is socially expected from them. They are supposed to be modest, shameful, stoic, and impassive (1995, 170-171). Women are

expected to endure a lot of pain without complaining. As it is almost all around the world, says Paz, women in Mexico are objectified by men and society (1995, 171).

Talking about gender differences, Paz says that in Mexican society men tend to be seen as aggressors and women as victims. Considering that religiosity is one of Mexicans' strongest features, it is not surprising that women tend to identify with a bleeding and suffering Christ. Women also identify with the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, an indigenous virgin, that offers consolation to the powerless, the poor, and the ones who go through intense suffering. Because of the harsh socio-economic reality that lower class Mexicans have experienced throughout generations, they have developed a great tolerance towards suffering. In a way this explains why Mexicans come to the US and why they are able to endure living in a country whose culture is so radically different from theirs.

Paz lived for a while in Los Angeles and reflected about the differences between Mexicans and Americans. He says that unlike African Americans, Mexicans do not want to be assimilated by US culture. With their attitude and tastes they seem to insist on what makes them unique and thus to reaffirm their cultural and ethnic identity. Through their words and behavior they make it clear that US society has not been able to assimilate them, and through varied means they express their desire to keep being different (1995, 149). Paz found that Mexicans who live in the US tend to experience solitude, partly because they become extremely critical and aware of cultural differences and partly because they do not get together with other Mexicans (1995, 154).

Another point Paz emphasizes is that when living in the US, Mexicans lose the close contact with nature they used to have. It is important to take into consideration that most of the Mexicans who migrate to the US are of peasant origin. In addition, Mexicans tend to be religious, traditionalist, and interdependent. This also explains why it is so hard for Mexicans to live in the US. Paradoxically, what helps them stay are the strong ties they have, especially with family members in their country (1995, 539). Paz considers as well that the solitude that Mexicans experience in the US has to do with the feelings of inferiority (ethnic, cultural, economical) vis-a-vis the rest of the world.

Most Mexicans who have come to live in the US have dealt with prejudice, discrimination, and exploitation characteristic of hierarchical and racist societies in their country. Paz says that, aside from cultural traditions, the common history of discrimination they have experienced and the economic difficulty to access higher education has strengthened the Hispanic communities living in the United States (1995, 540-541). The sense of not being assimilated and of not feeling completely welcomed in the American culture must also help bond Latin Americans as much as create a sense of identity among them.

Machismo and violence towards women

Gutmann (1996, 227) finds that Americans tend to think of machismo as characteristic of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Latin Americans. Gutmann suggests machismo and self-sacrificing women are, to a great degree, stereotypes held in the US about Mexicans. The Mexican media as well as

nationalist movements, which includes work of authors like Paz (1950), have had a central role in building a national identity that portrays Mexicans as *machistas* (1996, 226). In Mexico, both the media and intellectual movements have been male dominated, have insistently focused on *mestizaje* (mixture of races), machismo, masculinity (Gutmann 1996, 241), and have contributed to a fostering of a patriarchal culture. An argument to support that machismo is more a cultural “artifact” than a reality is that, according to Gutmann, from the very beginning the intellectual discourse established a link between machismo and “the poor, unsophisticated, unc cosmopolitan, and un-North American [segment of Mexican population]” (1996, 240).

This does not mean that in Mexico women are not victims of violence and objectification. In spite of what he says about Americans’ stereotypes towards Mexicans, Gutmann maintains that gender inequality is dominant; and asserts that throughout Mexico it is common for men to beat their wives (1996, 207). Women interviewed by this anthropologist find explanations for men’s attitudes in machismo, in Catholic principles which require women to be self-sacrificing, and in cultural beliefs and traditions (1996, 207). Guttmann found that Mexicans tend to associate machismo with physical and sexual aggression and dominance towards women (1996, 237). However, in his view, machismo has to do with feelings of superiority, arrogance, and hostility towards women in particular but not exclusively (1996, 235).

Based on literature review as well as on fieldwork experience in Santo Domingo, a community in Mexico City, Gutmann describes the Mexican culture as violent. He also asserts that many Mexicans use this cultural cliché as a way to justify violence. Although he acknowledges that culture plays a big part in the way social members behave, he sees violence as a matter of personal choice (1996, 211). Other popular rationale among Mexicans to explain male violence is that humiliation, abuse, and injustice abound in their society and that this in turn causes lower class men to express their frustration by beating their women. To Gutmann, this is another justification; the fact that wife beating is not exclusive of any class supports his view. Gutmann concludes that men use violence to regain the patriarchal authority and power they are losing due to social and economic changes (1996, 213). He also points to cultural, social and economic factors that have been challenging machismo. Aside from feminism and gay and lesbian rights movements, machismo has been questioned through “migration, falling birthrates, [and] exposure to alternative cultures on television” (1996, 239).

Current changes in gender roles

For decades, if not centuries, in Latin American countries there has been acute tension between genders because of inequality in distribution of housework that privileged men. Gutmann (1996) explains that this tension is one of the reasons that has been leading to changes in gender roles in the last two decades. In the study he conducted in Mexico City, Gutmann found that younger men are gradually doing more and more domestic chores than what their fathers and grandfathers did. Gutmann (1996, 150) says there are things Mexican men have started to help with and things they never do, such as laundry and

cooking. Although currently they tend to get more help from men, women work much more as the double day is still in force.

In Guttman's view, economic reasons play a central role in the gender role transformations that are taking place in Mexico. Nowadays, most women work outside their homes because of the need to increase family income. As a consequence, not only men have had to do a bit more at home, but women have become more independent. The rate of divorces and single mothers has increased and women's economic independence has a lot to do with it. Aside from women working outside their homes, the feminist movement and women's access to education have been central factors in determining sociocultural changes in gender identities and roles in Mexico (1996, 236). In spite of the intergenerational changes that have been taking place, women still work more than men and have less leisure time. "This fact is both cultural and fundamental, an expression and nexus of broader and ongoing gender inequalities" (1996, 153).

Like Guttman, Bourgois (1996) finds explanations for shifts in gender relations among Hispanics in socioeconomic phenomena. In his article about crack dealers in East Harlem, Bourgois focuses on the escalation of violence that has followed the socioeconomic changes that have been taking place in the United States. In general terms, according to Bourgois (1996) the following is the situation many Hispanic migrants who live in this country have been dealing with since the 80's. Employment opportunities for the working class have decreased considerably as a consequence of the restructuring of the global economy. Poverty has increased and public services for the marginal populations have deteriorated, mirroring the contempt and 'political hostility' with which marginal populations are treated (1996, 413). One of the central points in Bourgois' article is that social marginalization in America often pushes its victims to work in the 'underground economy' and to express their frustration through domestic and interpersonal violence (Bourgois 1996, 413). Paradoxically, people who had been social victims, particularly throughout their childhood, tend to become victimizers. They develop self-destructive behavior and typically oppress those who surround them –family members, women, neighbors, friends.

The feminist movement, changes in the global economy, women's incorporation into the labor force, as well as male migrants hardly finding stable jobs with wages that allow them to provide materially for their families are among the reasons that are leading to changes in gender power relations (Bourgois 1996, 413-414). In the case of the Puerto Ricans he studied, young men tend to control and oppress their women and children to reassert their authority. Bourgois finds this behavior to be an expression of their attempt to regain the dignity and masculinity that they feel are threatened. In Bourgois' words, they do it "to reassert the anachronistic patriarchal power relations of previous generations" (1986, 423). Based on his study Bourgois finds that "social suffering is complexly gendered"; he remarks that these socioeconomic circumstances affect men and women differently (1986, 414). While men tend to engage in violent and self-destructive behavior, women are becoming empowered and acquiring emotional and economic independence by earning a wage, by providing materially for their children, and by assuming parenthood by themselves.

While from one perspective we see that women are gaining autonomy as social and material circumstances change; however, from a global perspective, it is clear that women who face poverty are used by a system that takes advantage of the sociostructurally weakest. Sassen (1998) notices that one of the consequences of the economic changes that have been taking place throughout the world has been the increase in the incorporation of Third World women into wage employment (Sassen 1998). This increase has taken place both in offshore production in developing countries and in highly industrialized nations. In Sassen's view, these women enable "securing a low-wage labor force and fighting the demands of organized workers in developed countries" (Sassen 1998, 111). Capitalism takes advantage of the cheap labor that Third World women offer in a functional way. When corporations are able to operate in less developed countries, women's low-wage labor is sought. On the other hand, when businesses and organizations (such as restaurants, factories, and hospitals) are located in developed nations, corporations as well as individuals are encouraged to hire female migrants whenever possible. In this way they profit from the cheapest wage employment with employees who, as immigrants, have no civil rights.

Discrimination

Paz (1995, 535) finds that the very roots of discrimination towards Hispanics rely in the fact that since the 1700's Europeans and Americans considered Spanish, Portuguese, and their descendants inferior. In fact, ethnocentrism explains to a certain degree the racial stereotypes that have been associated with different cultures and ethnicities. Ethnocentric attitudes become noticeable in the practices and in the body of knowledge built by a culture. Psychoanalyst Roland (1988), for instance, after a deep contact with people from India and Japan, realized that psychological knowledge, even though assumed universal, is western-centric. This explains why in the US, Hispanics among other groups are often not understood as they are seen "pejoratively in their development and functioning" (1988, xviii).

Johnson (2001) finds explanations for discrimination and racism in historical and economic reasons. Racist attitudes were strengthened along with the development of capitalism. In order to justify imperialism and oppression, Americans and Europeans "developed the idea of whiteness", equating white with human, pure, correct, and legitimate (2001, 49). The people they were exploiting were treated as inferior while they reinforced the belief that, being superior, they had the right to treat them that way. This pattern continued throughout centuries shaping the identities, beliefs, and attitudes of the different social groups.

Johnson finds capitalism to be a system with no ethical considerations in which even the damage or tragedy of one creates profit for another. Capitalism is based on inequality; because profit makes this system work, the cheaper the labor, the better. As a consequence, most people get low pay and have little opportunities for advancement. A small group controls and oppresses the majority who in turn struggles with scarcity and engages in selfish, fearful, distrustful, and antagonistic behavior directed across differences of "race, ethnicity, and gender" (Johnson 2001, 139). Unable to see the roots of the problem,

the majority of the population, addresses its rage and resentment against minorities, thinking that they take away from them the little work and services they have. In this way, the economic issue ends up turning into a racial and political issue whose most frequent victims (at least in the last decades) have been illegal immigrants, and in particular, Hispanics.

Consistent and institutionally organized practices of discrimination have gradually created an economic and cultural gap between whites and other ethnic minorities in the US. According to George Lipsitz (2000), social democratic policies have privileged whites in the last 50 years. To mention an example, loan money for business or housing has primarily been channeled to whites. Lipsitz finds that in all thinkable areas, social democratic policies have denied minorities equal opportunities; access to healthy environments, health, education, housing; and benefits, rewards, and resources in general. Racial discrimination has been an overt and covert distinctive aspect of those policies. Racist practices and what results of them play a crucial role in shaping collective identities.

Discrimination has been as well a distinctive aspect of the private sector. Kirschenman and Neckermen (2000) refer to how race and class intersect in employment practices. Preconceptions, stereotypes, and expectations about class and race get in the way when employers are planning to hire or deal with employees. Race and class are often confounded, and Black and Hispanics tend to be seen as lower class and whites as middle class. After conducting research in the US, Kirschenman and Neckermen found that for most employers, the color of a person's skin as well as their sociocultural background and the area where they live determines their work ethic, their attitude toward work, and their tendency to create tensions in the workplace.

Given that racial and cultural stereotypes are so widely spread and so deeply rooted in people's psyches, it is undeniable that they are also be a consequence of mass media. The role of audiovisual media has been central in fostering the distorted and simplistic image that most Americans have of minority groups. Lichter and Amundson (2000) assert that the representation of ethnic minorities, and in other cases their exclusion from television, have perpetuated racist stereotyping. Minority cultures tend to be ridiculed. They are often presented unreal, out of their context, and distanced from their true experience. At the same time, racial tensions and cross-cultural conflicts are often omitted, simplified or used as a source of humor. Because among ethnic minorities Blacks have more space on TV, the common belief is that the basic racial tension in the US is between Blacks and Whites. Martinez (2000) argues that Latinos, Chicanos, and Asian/Pacific Islanders have been made invisible in Americans' minds and discourse about race and racism as a result of the supremacy of the black-white racial conflict.

Referring to how Latin Americans tend to be portrayed on TV, Lichter and Amundson (2000) posit that usually Hispanic characters are cruel, nasty, evil and greedy criminals, drug dealers, or lords; or they are foolish, poor, faceless or unskilled laborers. On the other hand, positive role models of Hispanic background are extremely rare. The fact that in most cases Hispanic characters' individuality is not presented, developed, or contextualized leads the audience to make generalizations and to have a simplistic

view of Latin Americans and their culture. Aside from the distortion created through the characters chosen and the way they are portrayed, the media does not offer a presentation of the reality of Hispanic history; there is neither an exploration of the complexity and diversity of Hispanic culture, or a reference to Latin American's contributions to American history and society (2000, 377).

In spite of the fact that Mexicans' low wage labor keeps the US economy running, Chavez (1992) explains how the media, in complicity with politicians, has contributed to creating the idea that the immigration of Mexicans is a problem. Undocumented Mexicans have typically been portrayed as "abusers of local social services, particularly health care and welfare" (1992, 271). In the last couple of decades, they have also been depicted as criminals. This has played a central role in the US public concern with Mexicans' presence in local communities (1992, 300). As a result, there is a general tendency to impede their integration into US society by denying basic services to them and to their children. However, the truth is that there is a high demand for Mexican labor, considering that Americans are having fewer children while demand for labor in the US is increasing (1992, 275).

Several factors have been adding up throughout time to strengthen prejudices against Latin Americans, especially when they live as undocumented workers in highly industrialized nations. Discrimination and exploitation are still issues today that many Hispanics who live in the US have to deal with on a daily basis. Often, Mexicans among other Latin Americans are victims of what Philippe Bourgois (1996) calls "symbolic violence." This is a behavior that marginalizes, excludes, disrespects and mocks of those who are social-structurally weak. Victims of "symbolic violence" are often illegal, poor, illiterate, and ethnically different (Bourgois 1996). American society tends to blame the victims for their poverty, for the levels of violence they experience, and in general, for the situation in which they live. Unfortunately, Americans' interpretations of poverty among Hispanics in turn feed prejudices against them.

Migration

Glick-Schiller and colleagues (1995) explore the motivations for people of developing countries to migrate. In their view, socio-economic difficulties are among the main reasons for people to go to capitalist countries such as the US. 'Post-colonial' countries like Mexico received financial assistance and engaged in loans during the 60's and 70's when international capital was available. The inability to pay the loans and the steep interests that these countries were charged contributed to serious "indebtedness and economic retrenchment" (1995, 50). As a consequence, Third World countries got trapped in a vicious cycle in which lack of funds meant impossibility to pay debts and boost the internal economy, and therefore, difficulty in receiving financial assistance.

In addition, institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been demanding indebted countries to follow their policies in order to continue to receive financial assistance. Those guidelines, however, weaken the socioeconomic structure and deepen the gap between the poor and the rich. The continuous impoverishment of standards of living has been pushing people to move to bigger cities or

to countries that offer better social and economic opportunities, even though at the beginning they experience economical hardship in addition to cultural impact.

Downing (1996) developed the concept of “social geometry” to explain the centrality of the interconnection between people, time, and space in defining people’s identities. Downing has studied populations that have lost their homes or have had to leave their towns or cities as a result of natural disasters, political conflicts, and development projects. He found that involuntary displacement leads to different forms of impoverishment, one of them being social or cultural. Because culture is the result of the bond between people, time and location, separation from the physical space leads to social disarticulation and takes place even if economic circumstances are improved after the displacement. He explains how in the case of the displaced the answer to the question “where are we?” requires a reexamination of “who are we?” Although migrants leave their homes voluntarily, they also temporarily lose a sense of who they are.

Talking about the influence of modern communication in global changes, Appadurai (1997) posits that the media plays a significant role in people’s desire and/or decision to migrate. Individuals’ plans for the future and what they decide in terms of migration is generally influenced by transnational communication and by those who have migrated or are in process of migrating. Robert Alvarez (1987), who conducted research in Alta and Baja California to explore migration patterns among Mexican migrants to the US, has a somewhat different view. He points out that individuals’ decisions to leave their country have not only to do with seeing migration as an economic opportunity. Economic and social support that kin, already settled in the US or established throughout the border, offer to family members is the central reason that motivates people’s decisions. In addition, Alvarez asserts that migration is “multidimensional and encompasses both the self-determining choices of migrants as well as socioeconomic contexts conditioned by the interplay of foreign...and Mexican politics” (Alvarez 1997, 170).

Appadurai (1997) stresses cultural change when he refers to transformations that take place due to migration. When families migrate they incorporate new ideas and values shaping their knowledge, they acquire new practices, their relationships experience modifications, and they tend to drop old and/or include different consumption habits. In such a transformative environment, Appadurai (1997, 44) argues, it becomes very hard to hold on to traditions or to ‘reproduce culture’. Although what Appadurai says cannot be denied, Alvarez (1987) points to something different and not necessarily contradictory. After studying Mexican migration from a historical and socio-cultural focus, Alvarez found the role of the family to be central in ensuring ‘sociocultural stability’, in facilitating adaptation, and thus, in contributing to maintain cultural values (Alvarez, 1987, 1). Pivotal is the idea that migration tends to strengthen family ties as family solidarity and relations are enhanced.

In addition to the family dynamic, Alvarez notes that the development of social networks between migrants who belong to the same country or culture also plays a crucial role for successful adaptation. Social relations are built upon common sentiments and experiences, and on a “specific cultural history”, says Alvarez (1987, 163). The sociocultural networks of the Mexicans he studied proved to help maintain

the migrants' culture deterring "drastic change while reinforcing communal ties" (Alvarez 1987, 165). With regard to Appadurai's observation that migrants' relationships change, Alvarez points to the fact that when people who come from a more traditional type of society are exposed to a greater level of modernity they tend to establish different types of relationships. However, Alvarez finds that these new relationships reproduce the 'supportive patterns' that were central in the more traditional communities (1987, 165-166).

Traditionally, immigrants have been seen as uprooted people who leave their homeland and cut bonds with their past as soon as they establish in a different locality. But the ties that immigrants tend to maintain with their country have motivated a group of social thinkers to do research and reflect on migration from a broader and deeper perspective. Glick-Schiller and her colleagues (1995) have come up with the term "transmigrants" to refer to immigrants who incorporate in a new society but keep strong bonds with their country, whether economical, social, political, familial, or more typically, a combination of all.

As a result of the strong link built with their homeland, these authors argue that transmigrants' identities are constantly under the influence of the two cultures and 'nation-states'. They find that currently this influence is facilitated and accentuated by modern technology and media (Glick-Schiller et.al. 1995, 48). In the case of the US, the desire to insure the newcomers' loyalty to the country led American society to overlook, disapprove and even ban immigrants' ties with their culture. Proof of this is the fact that immigrants were often not allowed to speak their own language or keep practicing their traditions.

According to Glick-Schiller and her co-authors (1995), the strong ties migrants maintain with people in their countries are a sign that a complete incorporation to the new place is "either not possible or not desirable" (1995, 52). People often migrate because the social and economic conditions in their countries are not ideal and often because they suffer from poverty themselves. In spite of having a very low income, people who decide to migrate take the risk and spend a considerable amount of money to leave their country with the idea that if things do not go very well, what they will make, in economic terms, by migrating will allow them at least to keep their status, possessions, and resources they already have. The ties they establish with their homeland often serve the purpose of reassuring that their social and economical position will be maintained while they are absent (1995, 54).

A common pattern among migrants, due to severe economic needs, is the migration of many family members to different countries or to different locations in a country. In this way and for this reason, a complex web of familial support is created and reassured, increasing possibilities of survival and material accomplishments (Glick-Schiller et.al. 1995, 54). Although family networks tend to be mostly functional and beneficial, they may also represent a source of conflict and disagreement. In order to insure their future and that of their children and relatives, typically immigrants engage in some or all of these activities: purchase land, build houses, and start businesses, often both in their country of origin and in the receiving country (Glick-Schiller et.al. 1995, 53).

Economical interests have motivated certain owners of transnational capital, politicians and the media to foster the belief that undocumented immigrants are undesirable and are to be blamed for the socioeconomic problems that most Americans face. Proposition 187 in California is an example of this trend to attack undocumented workers by denying them basic services. Since the US is a country of immigrants, the public discourse cannot make generalizations; therefore, a way to avoid having undesired groups in this society and to disguise racial prejudices has been to attack the undocumented. In that way, the US, through the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) reassures its right to decide which ethnic groups are welcomed and which are not.

Mexican migration and life changes

Rouse (1992) conducted a study that focuses on the migration patterns of Aguilillans (Aguililla is a *municipio* located in Michoacan, Mexico). In particular, he explores the lives of two brothers who had lived in the US for more than a decade and who had managed to make a living in this country. According to Rouse, Mexicans have been migrating to the United States for more than a century. In most cases, their pattern of migration has been 'temporary and circular' which means they have come, worked for a while and then returned back. Since the 60's, however, settlement has become more and more common. During the first decades of Mexican influx to the US, typically men left their families to return months or years later. Since the mid 60's, the levels of migration and settlement in the US increased and "women and children began to migrate in greater numbers" (1992, 29).

Rouse goes back to the 40's to explain Aguilillans' reasons for migrating and settling in the US. "Mexican policies diverting capital from small-scale farming into industry and commercial agriculture, mounting U.S. demand for foreign labor, and marked differences between wage rates in the two countries encouraged many Aguilillans to migrate northwards. From the mid 60's onwards, the growing need for workers in urban services and light assembly prompted increasing numbers to settle" (Rouse 1992, 43).

Most Aguilillans settled in Redwood City, CA. Being undocumented and subject to additional restrictions for legal entry to the US, most of them worked in the 'service sector'. "Men found jobs as gardeners, landscapers, janitors, and dishwashers, while women who earned wages generally did so as hotel cleaners, child-minders, and domestic servants" affirms Rouse (1992, 29). Typically, Aguilillans went from a subsistence farming economy centered on the family into a capitalist economy. Stressing class differences, Rouse points that as Mexicans became wage-laborers, they also became 'proletarians'.

This class transformation entailed several cultural changes as well. The legal situation in which these Mexicans were in and the types of work they were doing demanded them to be "good citizens" as well as "good consumers" within the particular social expectations for proletarian class and American way of life (Rouse 1992, 31). This author found that migrants' activities and patterns of consumption responded directly to their condition as illegal workers. Modesty, in the case of women, and privacy were among the most salient features of their life in Aguililla. In California however, the display of economic achievements

was not only trendy, but necessary in order to keep up socioeconomic standards and to avoid attracting the authorities' attention, and thus jeopardizing their jobs and stay in the country. In order to avoid the police and the INS, Rouse reports how the Mexicans he studied had to make choices of how to behave: where to go, what to do, and even how to look. In the end, these limitations shaped their values and beliefs (i.e. going from work to home) and created habits particular to a social class. Class transformations, in turn, led the men studied to experience a sense of lack of independence as well as to feel their domestic authority threatened (1992, 38-41).

Talking about gender differences with regard to space, Rouse points that in Aguillilla, public space was associated with men while domestic space with women and children. In Mexico, among the masculine roles were expanding social networks, controlling their family members' movements, and keeping 'internal hierarchies' "that ascriptively privileged not just men over women but parents over children and old over young" (Rouse 1992, 33). Rouse refers to how being exposed to a different culture in the US, Mexican men tend to lose power over their family. Rouse finds that women joining the labor force and children going to school challenges men's traditional control of their wives' and their children's use of public space. However, as primary wage-earners, Rouse affirms men continue to have authority over their partners. Because of the type of work that the Aguillillans did and the kinds of pressures put upon them due to their illegal status, Rouse points how home became markedly a space of leisure and relaxation for men.

Although these men's opinions and behavior showed that they had internalized proletarian values, at the same time, they kept guiding their lives, interpreting their experiences, and projecting themselves into the future from the cultural point of view they were raised in. Having one foot on each culture, Rouse notes that they "broadened their cultural repertoire to include both [perspectives]" (1992, 41). The cultural richness that being a transmigrant may bring is counterbalanced by the tensions and conflicts that arise as people deal with the demands and logic of two different worlds. Speaking about transnationalism, Rouse reports that ties with people in their homeland were carefully maintained and developed; these men continued to be taken into account when important decisions were made by their family members back in their homeland; and during their residency in the US, material possessions, land, and businesses in Mexico were kept and acquired (1992, 44).

CHAPTER III BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE EVEN START PROGRAM¹

First impressions

The Even Start program takes place at Lincoln School, an elementary school in South Corvallis. This part of town is considered a relatively low-income area of Corvallis and Lincoln School has the poorest students in the school district. The classroom where Even Start takes place is big. Although it has only one window, it has enough light. Aside from having lots of furniture, and cubbies with books, it is full of educational material. There are eight big tables distributed throughout the classroom. In one of the corners, there is an area full of toys for kids to play with. Some cubbies help give privacy to the children's area. There is also a corner set off just for babies, with colorful mats, mirrors, and playthings.

The following quote was taken from my field notes. It describes what usually takes place at the beginning of each day in the adults' English class.

It is one o' clock in the afternoon. Dee is in the classroom. She greets her students effusively as they arrive with their children. People say hi to each other and the women get in groups and start talking. Some of the kids get together and play. Noise gets increasingly louder. Before the class starts, kids, ages 1½ to five go with their teachers. The infants stay with their mothers. At 1:15, most of the women are there. Dee starts the class. Gradually, the women settle down. Order and quietness are subtly established. The flow of the class gets interrupted by crying babies and by some of the students' chatting but Dee does not pay attention to this and continues teaching.

Even Start, a national family literacy program

Even Start is a federal family literacy program that recruits disadvantaged families with low literacy skills including families with limited English proficiency. This program is meant to offer low-income families with educational needs the opportunity to become more self-sufficient through raising their education status, acquiring basic job skills, and learning English –when they are non-native speakers. The program also prepares children under 7 so that it becomes feasible for them to be successful at school (Research Corporation 2001, 29) In addition, these family literacy programs are intended to engage parents in the education and schooling of their children. Even Start is a family-centered initiative; thus, the services offered, the different components, the curricula, the staff selected, and the partnerships established with other agencies and institutions carefully respond to the particular needs of the families that each local program intends to serve.

Even Start was created in 1988. It was conceived to be funded as a partnership with federal, state, and local contributions (Even Start 1997). The services that are provided to the families through Even Start are built on existing community resources such as public schools, libraries, health programs, and so forth. In this way, the programs become linked to their communities. Ninety percent of the funding that the

1. Dee Curwen provided some of the specific information about the Even Start program and particularly, about the program at Lincoln School.

programs get are provided by state grants during the first year of a program's life. This percentage decreases by ten percent each year until the programs get fifty percent in their fifth year. Then, they receive the same amount during the next three years. The purpose of this funding policy is to insure that the programs belong to local communities in the long run (Even Start 1997). In order for programs to continue to receive funding and to make decisions about general policy direction, annual evaluations are required and conducted at both local and national levels. Even though the grants are for 4 years, each program must write a continuation grant for the following year.

All Even Start programs include these basic components and they are designed by each program to meet its participants' needs.

1. **Adult Basic Education** which is designed to improve general literacy and job skills. It can include the teaching of English for speakers of other languages, study in ABE or GED preparation.
2. **Early Childhood Education** is a pre-school equivalent. Children 1½ to 5 years old attend the program, acquire pre-literacy skills and, in general, develop their potential in order to succeed in school.
3. **Parenting Education** provides space for parents to learn and discuss topics that concern them, such as health and discipline.
4. **PACT (Parent and Child Together Time)** creates the conditions for parents and their children to learn together, encouraging parents to support their children's development.

A central belief of Even Start is that the best way to support socially disadvantaged families is by increasing the education level of both parents and their children. By giving parents the opportunity to learn and improve their education and job skills, they also aim at encouraging them to appreciate advancement through education. In turn, parents also learn to value and encourage their children's learning process, guaranteeing the possibility for both generations to overcome cycles of poverty, under-education, dependence, and failure. In order for families to achieve significant learning goals and make improvements in parenting skills, remaining in the program a good amount of time and attending the program regularly are encouraged (Research Corporation 2001).

The Even Start Program at Lincoln School

Two years ago Nancy Votrain, the program's coordinator got the grant with cooperation of the Corvallis School District. The intention was to serve Hispanic families by offering a service that would integrate and take into consideration the parents' and their children's educational needs and the school setting. Nancy and Dee Curwen, the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher had worked together previously to create an after school ESOL class with child care at Lincoln. For a long time they had wanted a school-based family literacy program. The setting allows the program to be more holistic than programs that meet in other settings such as churches and public libraries. Anna Miles-Smith, the

children's program coordinator, had experience in both grant reporting and children's programs. Together, through Even Start, Nancy, Dee, and Anna were able to create the kind of program each had envisioned.

The family literacy program that takes place at Lincoln School partners with Linn Benton Community College; Benton County Public Health Department; Head Start (which is a reading readiness program for children ages 4-5 with low economic and educational background); Benton County Commission for Children and Families; and Lincoln School. These institutions provide Even Start and its participants with services, and link them to the community while Even Start facilitates access to the Latin population for community agencies. These partnerships and contributions help these institutions, which are required by most granting agencies to show they are collaborating with the community and serving specific programs and populations.

The Even Start grant mandates that the program serve those with greatest need. The program requires participants to have at least one child between 0-7 years old, to have low-income (based on federal guidelines), and to have an education need. Corvallis Even Start targeted the Latino population. All participants are Spanish-speaking Mexicans. Although most women are undocumented, the fact that they qualify for a federal literacy program shows that the system needs undocumented immigrants' low-wage labor (Chavez, 1992). In spite that there is an official discourse that bans illegal immigration, Mexicans' importance in the US economy explains why the system paradoxically provides them with services and facilitates their acquisition of English.

Most of the adult participants did not complete high school, a few did not complete elementary school, and one was not exposed to formal education at all. One woman, although a university graduate, fit the education need because she did not know English. She entered the first year of Even Start and since then, the program has not accepted anyone with such high education skills. However, she proved to be a great asset as a role model for the class. Although her English skills actually developed slower than many with less education, she knew that she could learn and was not intimidated by the challenge. She modeled self-confidence and also was able to contribute ideas about how to study.

In many Even Start programs, the children's program is more like childcare or is administered by Head Start. Unlike these programs, at Lincoln the children's program is part of a carefully integrated program with the other components. There are separate classes for adults, toddler, pre-school, and after school children. The classes take place from Monday to Friday, from 1:00 to 3:30. All the activities are structured, based on literacy research to develop reading readiness and to strengthen school reading skills. Even Start parents have noted the difference in the skill levels of their children involved with Even Start compared with their older children who did not have this opportunity. Because the different parts of the program work so closely together, literacy activities introduced in the children's program can be reinforced through parallel activities in the adult class. Also, parents of infants and toddlers get information based on brain-research in a Parents as Teachers (PAT) curriculum in English and Spanish during PACT time.

The adult class

The adult class is a multi-level, multi-skill (reading, writing, speaking, listening) English language class. Some important objectives are to encourage students to have control of their own learning; to use English in their daily lives (to take risks even when their language is not perfect); to increase their participation in their children's schooling, through involvement in school activities and helping with homework. English language study includes activities that broaden students' knowledge in content material, cultural understanding and community resources while developing language skills. Participants are encouraged to write family stories in Spanish and English and to support native language literacy at home. Each student has put together a personal portfolio of all the in-class hand-outs and homework they have done throughout the year.

As one part of parent education, a *promotora* (who also does home visits) from the health department, presents classes in Spanish on topics such as Aids, breast cancer, and diabetes. She helped the class study for the food handler's license, which they all received. In addition, a mental health worker talks about stress, depression, domestic violence and abuse. Other guest speakers from organizations such as library, gleaners, Center for Rape and Domestic Violence (CARDV), and State Employment Office inform students about community resources.

The adult classes have faced several complexities. Because many women were exposed to few years of formal education, they had not developed enough learning skills and did not know how to study. This made it harder for them to learn. At the same time, it took them a while to view themselves as learners. Although the women have different levels of education, the fact that all of them are learning English serves as an equalizer. Proof of that is that a few women with more years of education have more difficulty learning than the other women.

For the women who have babies under 1½, there is no childcare. This represents a problem because these women cannot devote their full attention to the ESOL teacher. At the same time, when their babies cry, the group gets distracted. However, because things have worked in this way for almost two years, Dee, as well as most of the women, are used to listening to the babies.

Considering the women have low-incomes, some of them need to leave the program in order to find a job. Last year, a few chose night shifts to be able to attend Even Start in the afternoon. However, because they did not get enough sleep, their performance was not as good. Therefore, these women resigned and looked for other jobs.

Another problem is that in an effort to serve more Hispanic families, at the beginning of this year Even Start recruited new participants. Incorporating new, low-level beginners proved a challenge for both the teacher and the class. The continuing students perceived that the new students deterred their progress. The teacher had difficulty finding class activities to keep all levels engaged.

The link between Even Start and this study

Nancy and Dee were interested in this research for several reasons. First, they thought that this study had the potential for allowing the ESOL teacher and the program's coordinator to inform instruction, modify curricula, and better understand and satisfy the individual and cultural needs of its female adult participants. Second, the Even Start programs are typically evaluated through standardized measurements and they were interested in a qualitative approach that would go deeper into the minds and feelings of their students. Third, people who work at the program are concerned with their students' level of motivation as well as with the amount of time that they stay in the program. Both of them are important aspects considering that Even Start gets funded on the basis of evaluations and results. Being aware of the importance that self-perceptions have on determining the level of motivation and engagement in the educational context, Nancy and Dee felt this study could be extremely useful, not only to their program but to other literacy programs serving Hispanic populations.

CHAPTER IV METHODOLOGY

I opted for an in-depth study that will allow me to build social knowledge as a result of exploring the women's self-identities. I chose the qualitative method because, as Husserl (1970) argues, it is the most appropriate method to study human thought and action. Qualitative research was ideal for me to be able to answer to the questions I had and to come up with a cultural picture of who the women are and where they come from. I also chose qualitative research because I was interested in the women's phenomenological experience (Rossman and Rallis 1998, 72-73), and I wanted to use words instead of numbers to describe it. In order to have different perspectives and criteria from which to analyze the significance of Even Start in their lives as well as their self-identities and self-esteem, I chose to use interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. I selected these methodologies because I wanted to gather my data by interacting with the informants in an intimate and face-to-face situation.

The Even Start program at Lincoln School was interested in my study. In order to facilitate it, the coordinator agreed that I do my internship at their institution. Since my research was intended to be a contribution to the literacy program, the Even Start personnel agreed that this masters' research represent 80% of my internship and that in order to cover the other 20%, I collaborate with the program, and particularly, with the English teacher. By assisting Dee Curwen, my purposes were to conduct participant observation while the women were in class and to build rapport with the Mexican immigrants in order to be able to interview them and conduct the focus group.

Due to time considerations, I decided to interview 10 out of the 17 adult students. However, because it was crucial for the purposes of my research to learn about all the women's opinions about the program, I chose to conduct a focus group with the rest of them. I used participant observation as a means to triangulate my data. Observing and interacting with all the women helped compensate for the fact that I did not interview all of them. The fact that Spanish is also my mother tongue played a central role in facilitating my research and my interactions with the women.

The subjects

The women who attend Even Start come from different parts of Mexico as well as from different sociocultural backgrounds. Most of them are in their late 20's; the oldest is 38 and the youngest is 22. One student was not literate in any language, others had 3-12 years of schooling in Mexico, and one woman has a bachelor's degree. The majority were raised in small towns in the country while a few spent their childhood and adolescence in cities. Taking into account their parents' occupation and income as well as the women's level of education, the majority could be categorized as lower class.

Most of the informants have been in this country around 7 years, 17 years being the longest period and 2 the shortest. Almost all of them have a very low-income and are undocumented immigrants. Although the majority have worked in the US, currently only a few have jobs. All of them have children

and most of them have between 2 or 3 kids. Many of the children were born here. The majority take care of their children, most of which are under eight years old, and play the role of mothers while their husbands provide materially.

The Interviews

I decided to conduct in-depth interviews to approach each woman individually. The central areas of inquiry centered on their life histories and their opinions about the Even Start program. The purpose of the interviews was to explore the role that their culture, significant life experiences, and Even Start have had in shaping their self-identities. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten informants throughout October and November of 2002. In general terms, the interviews proved to be an excellent technique to have the subjects talk about their lives. I had become familiar to them through the internship, added to the fact that they knew about my research, and were willing to participate. This made it easier for me to create a relaxed and safe atmosphere for the women's "true selves" to arise (Turner and Billings 1991).

In order to choose which women to interview, Dee made a list of her students that included information such as number of children, the women's age, their level of education, and their level of commitment with the program expressed through assistance. There were no major differences between the women in terms of number of children. At the same time, her data revealed that most women attended the program on a regular basis. Considering this, I chose women whose ages were different and who were exposed to different number of years of education. (Chart 1 describes the demographic characteristics of the women interviewed.) Dee suggested that I interview the women before classes so that the students would not miss them. The women agreed and most interviews were conducted from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. The women were interviewed at the school's library, in an area where it was hard for others to see or hear us. In most cases it took us two sessions of two hours to complete each interview. When time ran out, we set another appointment. Knowing that we could meet again enabled the women to feel free of time constraints, and thus to relax.

The interviews consisted of three parts. First, I used a life history approach which allowed me to inquire about landmark events in their lives and to learn about their cultural and familial background. Secondly, I used semi-structured interviews and focused on their reasons for migrating to the US and their experiences in this country. Thirdly, again using semi-structured questions, I asked them about their experiences in Even Start, their opinions about the program, and the effects that participating in it has had on their lives. I used the questions of this section for the focus group as well.

Chart 1

Name	Birth year	Number of children	Rural/Urban	Years of school	Number of years in the US	Attendance
Isabel	73	3	Rural	9	9	regular
Maria	70	4	Rural	0	17	irregular
Amelia	73	3	Rural	9	7	regular
Laura	69	3	Urban	9	10	irregular
Soledad	69	1	Rural	12	7	regular
Patricia	76	2	Rural	6	5	regular
Olga	65	1	Rural	12	3	regular
Pilar	73	2	Rural	8	6	regular
Silvia	77	1	Urban	12	3	irregular
Luz	72	1	Rural	9	3	regular

A central methodology in the interviews was the life history approach. This method encourages people to tell about their lives in a natural and spontaneous way (Honigmann 1973, 131). Utilizing this technique was beneficial because it allowed the interviewees to speak freely and helped create a friendly atmosphere. Because I used mostly open-ended questions the women were the ones who chose where to start, what to say, and what to keep for themselves. In this way I was able to determine which topics were relevant to them and which aspects of their lives they felt proud or embarrassed of. Another advantage of using the life history approach is that it prevented the interviewees' answers from being conditioned and limited by my questions. Follow-up questions and probes were used when it was necessary to elicit detail or examples. I also used more questions when I needed the interviewee to expand a topic as well as to take the interview in the intended direction.

In the case of the women who are more articulate and outgoing, the life history approach proved to be particularly useful. An open-ended question and a few probes were enough to get them to share with me their experiences, feelings, and points of view. In the case of the women who are more shy and reserved, I had to use more probes and follow-up questions. The open-ended questions often left these women uncertain of my expectations. As I interviewed some women, I often felt that because of my role of interviewer, they perceived me as an authority figure, and thus, sought to get my approval with their answers. However, as I limited the scope of my questions, and reassured them I had no expectations whatsoever, they relaxed and regained their sense of confidence.

The Focus Group

I chose to conduct a focus group in order to talk to the women I was not going to interview. Only five women participated in the focus group. A few were absent that day and two women, the most introverted of the group, said they did not want to participate. The fact that these women did not participate

in the focus group limited my research. It would have been ideal for this study to include the perceptions and opinions of all the Even Start participants. However, the fact that I observed and interacted with all of them during class somehow compensated for it. The focus group lasted an hour. The primary areas of inquiry revolved around the importance that Even Start has on their lives as well as on their opinions about the program. The focus group was an excellent technique to generate discussion around the topics of interest. During the focus group, the women referred particularly to the benefits that the program offers and on their responsibilities as participants. They also made suggestions as to what can be improved in the program and how. Conducting the focus group was also useful in terms of my internship. Some of the things the women said in this occasion were later on used by the Even Start personnel to inform new policies.

Participant Observation

I chose participant observation as a way to triangulate my data. I conducted participant observation twice a week during October and November of 2002. I observed the subjects mainly at Dee's classes but also in a few celebrations that took place at Even Start. After finishing my internship, I had the opportunity to observe the subjects again, when I was invited to the lunch they had for Christmas and to the party they threw for Dee's birthday on February.

Conducting participant observation was a very useful technique to see the women in different academic and social contexts. Their behavior and the identities they displayed as they interacted with different people worked as a point of reference with which to contrast the literature I had reviewed and what the women said during the interviews and the focus group. In addition, observing the women enabled me to report about their self-understandings from a behavioral perspective.

Being an intern gave me an excuse to be at Dee's class without making the Even Start participants feel that I was there to observe them. Nevertheless, at the beginning, the women regarded me with distrust. By being around them during class periods and by being constantly welcomed and acknowledged by Dee, more and more I became in the subjects' eyes someone they could trust. In a few occasions, Dee asked me to assist the women while they were doing group work, so I answered their questions and helped them revise their work. Often times, I helped one of the women with her toddler so that she could follow the class. Doing these things allowed me to get involved in the group.

In order to avoid influencing their behavior with my presence, I often sat down at the back of the class, where nobody could see me. Observing without being observed enabled me to see the women behave as they usually do. In practical terms, sitting at the back also made it easier for me to take notes. The distance there was between the informants and me, in particular at the beginning, was useful as it allowed me to observe them mostly as an outsider. The fact that it took them a while to get used to my presence gave me the opportunity to see how their identities vary when they interact with someone they do not know.

In two occasions, I substituted Dee in class and this enabled me to play more of an insider's role. The first time I substituted for her, I shared with them nutritional information they were interested in receiving, and the second time we discussed cultural differences between Americans and Latin Americans. The fact that during the classes I spoke most of the time in Spanish, allowed me to see how their identities vary, within a class context, depending on the language they are exposed to. As an insider, I could see what it feels like to play the role of teacher having the informants as students. Aside from adding more elements to take into account in my analysis, playing this role was useful as it allowed me, as an intern, to share my insights with Dee.

Doing my internship at Even Start facilitated my research but did not necessarily allow me to become an insider in the complete sense of the term. The fact that I was not there every day, the differences in status between the informants and me, and the fact that as an intern, I had very few opportunities to interact with the women, kept me more often in the position of observer than in the position of participant. Central in defining my position as observer were the differences between the Mexican women and me. Considering that we had dissimilar legal status, level of education, and socioeconomic background, I never felt completely as an insider, nor was I treated as one. Although the women were friendly and many shared with me intimate aspects about their lives, we never established a close bond.

Considering that the purpose of my research was to build with them enough rapport in order to gather data, I find it was not a disadvantage to remain as an outsider. On the contrary, it helped me keep the focus on my research and to strive for objectivity. At the same time, it gave place for the subjects to share with me their opinions about the program and their classmates. Coming from a different country contributed as well for the women to perceive me as an outsider. This was to a great extent beneficial to the purposes of the research. Considering that Mexicans and Ecuadorians have a lot in common but at the same time have things that differentiate them, I tried to approach the women with a sense of curiosity and discovery.

Analysis

During the interviews, the focus group, and the participant observation, I took notes. Immediately after each dialogue took place, I transcribed it. Later on, I scanned my data for themes that would answer my research questions. After coding the dialogues and the field notes and extracting themes, I read all the information once more to make additional notes and look for similarities and patterns. At the same time I afforded attention to differences and exceptions. In order to conceptualize and evaluate meanings from the informants' quotations, I used my interpretive skills in concert with the literature I reviewed for this study, and my overall understanding of Latin American culture. The focus group as well as the interviews were conducted in Spanish. I only translated the quotes that I wanted to include in my paper.

Throughout the research I made conscious efforts to remain open to different explanations and perspectives. I also had to be careful in order not to make assumptions based on the cultural legacy that bonds Latin Americans. To avoid my interpretations from being biased and to enrich my study with different points of view, I often discussed my findings with Dee Curwen as well as with my advisor. Where I felt I determined the orientation of the study was in the coding of the interviews, in the selection of themes to be developed, and in the final organization and interpretation of the information.

The fact that I interviewed only ten of the seventeen women who attend the literacy program limited the research to a certain extent. If I would have been able to interview all of them, I would have had more elements to take into account in the analysis and this would have provided a broader perspective. Among the subjects, two were raised in Mexico City while the majority grew up in towns out in the country. Although this allows my research to reflect on the fact that most of the Mexicans that migrate to the US are of peasant origin, as Paz (1995) maintains, it reduced my chances of establishing contrasts between them. If I would have been able to compare different groups with an equal number of individuals based on place of origin and socioeconomic background, my research would have provided a broader and deeper view of Mexican society as well as of the women's reality. At the same time, considering that individuals' identities are shaped by different variables, even having the perfect sample, it would have been risky to categorize the women by taking into account one or even a few variables at a time.

CHAPTER V MIGRATION

Reasons for coming to the US

Listening to the women's stories has made me think that migration is like a whirlpool, constantly pushing people in a certain direction. Due to the scarce possibilities of advancement in Mexico and to the opportunities that, in spite of all, the United States offers, migrating has become epidemic. As more and more people migrate, more Mexicans feel tempted to do it. Proof of that is that almost every Mexican family has relatives living in the US. In fact, seven out of the ten women interviewed had family members living here who supported them morally and economically until they could live on their own. As Alvarez (1987) argues is the case for most Mexican immigrants, having social contacts in this country is one of the crucial factors that enabled and encouraged many of the subjects to come.

Although each of the women interviewed had particular reasons for coming to the US, as Glick-Schiller and colleagues (1995) affirm when they speak about the motivations for people of developing countries to migrate, I found socioeconomic difficulties brought most of the informants to this country. In Mexico, due to their socioeconomic background, such things as saving money, owning a personal business, getting an education, building a house, or getting a car were dreams denied to them. This is why for many, coming to this country was seen as the only way out.

No matter what situation or difficulty they were experiencing in Mexico, the women interviewed believed that by coming and living here things were going to improve. They also found hope in the possibility of living in a country with different rules, ideas, and socioeconomic standards. During the interviews, some suggested that part of the reason why they decided to come was to free themselves and their children from discriminatory practices based on class membership and ethnicity. Because they wanted to have a better life and be able to offer their children a whole array of opportunities, many of the women were easily convinced to migrate.

Due to the fact that there is not a legal route for Mexicans to cross the border, both Mexicans and Americans have built a human road that, although dangerous, makes migration possible. From the border to their final destination in the US, those who migrate are often supported, helped, and assisted by *coyotes*, relatives, friends, Americans, as well as by those who are in their same situation. In spite of the economic motivations that maintain this social structure, there seems to be a human side charged with adrenalin and a spirit of solidarity and impetus that motivates people to help each other. People holding each others hands to cross a river, a *coyote* telling his customers whole-heartedly "God bless you", and people risking to cross other family's babies in their car are some of the women's experiences that speak of the spirit that characterizes the border and its actors. In spite of the dangers they face as they cross the frontier, by feeling part of a strong, although temporary, community, many of the informants said they did not feel afraid but rather empowered and joyous.

Central in the women's decision to migrate were the experiences of acquaintances or relatives that had come to live in the States. All of the women knew someone or had heard of someone who had come to this country. The fact that those who were in the US had "successfully" made it, had found a job, were sending money to their relatives, and, in the best of circumstances were building a house in Mexico, led them to think that their situation would definitely improve by coming here.

Appadurai (1997) argues that imagination and the media influence people in their decisions to migrate. Most of the informants, particularly those who were raised in the country, had no access to audiovisual media and relatively low access to the radio and to printed material. In the case of all the informants, imagination did play an important role in their decision to migrate, and only in the case of a few, the media. Although some say they had no idea of what they were going to find here, many had expectations based on the things they had heard their acquaintances say. In the case of some of the women who lived in the country, they imagined what they were going to find based on something tangible—a picture, a postcard, money that was being sent. Because of the things they had heard but especially because of what they had imagined, many thought life in the US was going to be easier. Some believed that once in this country they would rapidly find a job and make money. When asked how she imagined the US, Isabel replied "I was not curious about it and we had no TV; but my sister who was living in this country was sending money. Because of that I thought things were easy here, but they are not! It is very hard!"

In the case of a few women, social more than economic issues determined their decision to migrate. There are a few cases I want to mention. Patricia, as a single mother, wanted to get away from her hamlet because people were criticizing her. At the same time, she wanted to take her child to a place where he could be at peace and not pointed out. The best option for her was to go to a place where nobody would know her and where she and her child would be regarded as everybody else. When a cousin talked with Patricia about the possibility of coming to the United States she did not give it too much thought and quickly made up her mind. The other case I want to mention is that of Laura. Aside from feeling trapped in a circle of poverty, Laura was married to a man she did not love. She felt miserable and resented both her husband and child for her state. She saw in migrating the only opportunity for a complete change in their life and in fact, after years of hard work, that is the way things turned out.

What happened to Maria is probably extremely unusual and because of that, worth mentioning. In her case, extreme aggression and machismo did not give her a choice but forced her to come. Being an adolescent she was obliged to migrate by her ex-boyfriend—an outlaw who was in his late thirties. Maria came with this man seventeen years ago. Because of the way in which she was drawn to the US, she was not allowed to say goodbye to her family. After several years of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse she finally freed herself from the aggressor. A couple of years later she fell in love with a man. They have lived together for about 10 years and have 3 children. The fear of getting caught in the border, in addition to the meager wage they live on, has not allowed Maria to go back to Mexico ever since.

Experience as migrants

For most of the women interviewed, separating from their families, and particularly from their parents, was the hardest part when leaving their countries. It was especially hard for those who had always lived with them in the same place. As it happens with people who are involuntarily displaced (Downing, 1996), these women had not had the experience of developing psychological mechanisms to adjust to a new environment. It was hard for the informants to separate from their intimate social network because in Mexico they were accustomed to being surrounded by family members and friends and sharing almost everything with them.

Although many of the informants have relatives in this country, and were supported by them when they came to the US, the majority felt terribly lonely, sad, and unprotected. In spite of the years that have passed, some of the informants said they still feel depressed and homesick once in a while. Aside from the fact that the women could not communicate because they did not speak English, the explanation for their feelings might be in Downing's "social geometry" (1996). The fact that people's identities are based on intersections of 'socially constructed' time, space, and people implies that when the social geometry is altered, people's cultural and emotional universes are dramatically affected. That is probably why, when asked what they miss from Mexico, many women said "everything" but were not completely sure what it is that they miss.

In spite of the difficulties, most women have had a positive experience by living in this country. All of them pointed to the fact that here they and their children have more opportunities. The money they make allows them to buy things that in Mexico, due to the lower wages, would take them years to buy. Because many of their kids were born in this country, they will most likely be able to choose a profession and go to college. They also said that in this country they get things and services they cannot get in Mexico such as education, food, and cheap clothes. In general terms, all the women find they are doing better in social and economic terms, and for all these reasons they do not want to return.

Although the informants are far from being rich, their partners have a job, they all have a place to live, enough food to eat, clothes to wear, and both them and their children are receiving education and learning a second language. In the case of some, they also own and drive a car. Many of these things were a utopia for them while they lived in Mexico. Comparing her life now with the one she had, Luz said: "Here you live better, you eat better, and you have plenty of clothes. There, we basically ate beans and meat while here we eat whatever we want. Over there we could afford to buy a pair of pants once a year, here you can make that amount of money in a week." In spite of the fact that they usually live on their husbands' salary, which in most cases is the minimum wage, the sense of abundance they get from living in the US represents a strong motivation to stay in this country.

In all cases as well, living in this country has meant the opportunity to learn to be more independent. When asked if she has changed due to migration, Amelia replied that in this country she does things that she did not do in Mexico like driving a car and working. "Here you learn to value your job even

more. If you do not work you do not eat. Over there, you visit your relatives, neighbors or friends and they offer food to you.” Being away from family members and having to deal with difficulties by themselves has forced them to become autonomous. The longer they stay in this country, the more they realize the importance of being self-sufficient and the more they strive to do things independently.

The Mexican women interviewed feel proud of the things they have accomplished in this country and feel happy about the fact that they are learning a second language, meeting other people, and expanding their perspective of life. They also feel satisfied with their children’s accomplishments and with the possibilities that keep opening before their eyes. For all these reasons all of them feel more hopeful about the future than they felt in Mexico. When I asked Pili her opinion about the US she replied: “It is like a bridge that allows you to do the things you had the potential to do.”

Working in the US

Eight out of the ten women interviewed have worked in this country. They have worked in factories, restaurants, nurseries, hotels, farms, and houses. For the most part, they have worked as janitors or non-skilled workers. During the interviews some women suggested Mexicans tend to be exploited. They mentioned that employers demand more from Hispanics because they are in a disadvantaged position due to their illegal status. A few said that on occasions, their American coworkers have taken advantage of that. Patricia for instance mentioned that when she worked in a restaurant they made her responsible for everything because she is Hispanic. She also said that the fear of being deported leads Hispanics to put up with injustices and exploitation.

Aside from being treated differently from Americans, the informants have been paid the minimum wage and in most cases their jobs have been tiresome, repetitive, and physically demanding. Many times, the conditions under which they have worked has put their health and safety at risk. Isabel has a problem with her wrist since she worked canning. “We had to move our hands really fast”, she explained. When Laura came to the US she was hired by a family to work as a babysitter. She said the woman used to yell at her and made her do demanding domestic work even though she was pregnant. Finally, when she was about to give birth, she was fired.

In other cases, the type of work they do not only affects them but has negative implications for their families. Amelia used to work for the company that was in charge of cleaning OSU. She said that they gave her a broom, a mop, and a vacuum and she was responsible for cleaning an entire building by herself. The fact that she had to this job by herself and at night often made her feel depressed. However, the hardest part for her was that she could barely sleep in the morning. At that time, her youngest child was 3 and she was ready to play and be fed when Amelia was finally able to go to bed. The altered schedule caused her to become irritable specially when interacting with her children. She said she could not stand when they made too much noise and often yelled at them to shut up.

In spite of the fact that they tend to get false social security numbers in order to be able to work, some women also mentioned how hard it is for them to find a job. As Kirscherman and Neckermen (2000) argue, some of the informants believe Hispanics tend not to be hired, aside from legal constraints, because of racial prejudices. Maria pointed out that there are Americans who although they do not want to work, the system protects them by giving them money; however, Mexicans who are willing to work hard are denied that opportunity.

It bothers me that we can't work here. When you go looking for a job they require the social security number and if you don't have it, they don't hire you. Many Americans are good people and they work hard. Many others don't work and get help from the government; but we want to work and we can't. Often Americans say "Mexicans take away our jobs and don't speak English." I don't agree with that. If we find jobs is because no one wants those jobs. We work for the wellbeing of our families, we are needy. We are people that want to make money with our own effort. We can't be blamed if we ask for work and we get hired.

Sassen (1998) says that due to economic changes, Third World women are increasingly being incorporated into wage employment both through offshore production in developing countries and as migrants, in industrialized nations. In both cases, these women are hired mainly because of the cheap labor they offer. The experiences of some of the interviewees suggest this is true. In Mexico, a few of the subjects had worked in American offshore factories. When they came here, they worked at industries where they hire Hispanic women exclusively and where they pay them the minimum wage. In spite of the fact that Hispanic women tend to be hired because they secure low- wage labor force, one of the informants regards with a sense of pride the fact that her employers hire only women of her country. Soledad, who works as a janitor in a hotel, said her boss hires only Mexicans because he knows they do a good job cleaning and because he has had no theft problems with them. In addition, she says Americans tend not to clean thoroughly.

Often times, when Hispanics are hired, their culture and language are seen as barriers and the responsibility of overcoming those barriers is put solely on them. Olga works at a nursery. Her boss only hires Latinos and has done so for several years; however, he does not speak any Spanish. Paradoxically, he tells his workers with an air of superiority they should go learn English. The informants referred to how the Hispanics that know some English get promoted, earn higher wages, and serve their bosses as interpreters. However, in the case of the informants, particularly during their first years they had to communicate with their bosses using signs and gestures.

Aside from being the means to earn their livelihoods, their jobs have represented opportunities for self-improvement. Working has allowed the Mexican women to get to know themselves better, meet other people, learn new things, assume more responsibilities, and in general, become more independent and self-confident. By joining the labor force they have had to meet challenges, particularly because of the language and often because they were unskilled workers when they started. Due to a history of sexual, emotional, and physical abuse, Maria used to feel unworthy. Working as a seamstress in a factory and

being promoted helped her to regain some confidence. Because at that time she was illiterate and thus did not feel very competent in the cognitive domain, this job also allowed her to realize that she was intelligent and that she could learn and achieve things.

In spite of social prejudices I found the women who work as janitors are not ashamed of doing that kind of job. In this country, Soledad has worked cleaning hotel rooms for many years. She likes the fact that she can work independently without having someone bossing her around. She also feels proud because the hotel owners once in a while have hired her to clean their houses. Due to the fact that they do not ask others, to her this is a sign of trust. Pili, who works cleaning houses, acknowledges she is not intellectually challenged but sees other advantages. I asked her opinion about doing that type of work: "It is fine. They pay you good money. The American gives me \$12 per hour and the woman from Panama \$7. I like this job because when my children get out of school I can be with them. If you leave your children to make money you end up regretting it."

Working in the US as illegal immigrants has meant going down on the social scale for some of the informants. In spite of their families' socioeconomic background, and in many cases because of it, some of the subjects were encouraged by family members to study and acquire skills that will allow them to get jobs typically performed by people of middle class. As a result, some of the informants worked in their country as secretaries, vendors, or accountants. The fact that they were not doing any sort of domestic work and that they enjoyed of a better status because of it represented a source of pride for them and for their parents. Once in this country, as undocumented workers they had no choice but to accept whatever job was offered to them. Soledad for instance, studied accounting in Mexico but here her best option is to keep working as janitor at the hotel.

The case of Olga suggests that the starting status of a person makes a difference in how they view their job here. After finishing school Olga worked selling fabrics in a store. She was soon promoted to sales supervisor and held that position for years. When she came to the US the first job she found was in a hotel as a janitor. It was very hard for her to be in such position. "I could not believe my job was to clean because I had not done that in Mexico. After three days of working as a janitor I regretted having come to this country."

Speaking English

As mentioned before, separating from family members was the hardest part of leaving their countries. But once in the US, not speaking any English was and has been for years one of the toughest parts. Amelia for instance said that not being able to understand what Americans said became traumatic for her. Olga recalls that when she crossed the border, in her way to Oregon she was terrified by the possibility of being asked questions and of being identified and deported if they found out she was not able to respond.

At the beginning, and in the case of some, throughout several years, they communicated with Americans through gestures. As they learned some English and started speaking, many learned to become

ashamed of their pronunciation because of the accent and because often people had a hard time understanding what they wanted to say. In order to avoid feeling embarrassed many avoided speaking, thus limiting their opportunities to learn and practice what they knew. That is the case of Patricia who said that English for her represented a huge barrier. While working at a fast food restaurant there were two American girls she did not like very much. "I asked something and they laughed. I felt really bad so I decided not to talk to them ever again. When I did not know somebody, I tried not to speak."

In Even Start, being surrounded by people who are also in the process of learning English and who feel or have felt embarrassed to speak has helped many realize this is common. In the case of those who were particularly shy to speak, seeing that others who spoke in class did not have perfect pronunciation either gave them courage to overcome their fear. Their teacher has also done a wonderful job encouraging them to talk no matter how imperfect their pronunciation or grammar is. As a result, most of them are not so ashamed any more and thus are more daring to speak in class and to interact with Americans.

Among the women interviewed, Maria is the one that has had the hardest time trying to overcome the language barrier. She arrived to the US 17 years ago without a year of formal education. Not knowing how to read and write in Spanish, learning a second language seemed to her an insurmountable goal. With the help of an Ecuadorian she met in New York, she learned some basic things. However, for the most part, she depended on others to communicate. Last year, at Even Start, she learned some literacy skills in Spanish with Dee. Nowadays one of her classmates, who is part of a literacy program sponsored by the Mexican government, is helping her improve her skills. In spite of it all, Maria has been attending the Even Start Program since October 2001. Thanks to her commitment, now she understands much more English and she is able to speak a little bit.

Going back to Mexico

Almost all of them talk about how much they miss their families and how they would like to go back to be with them. But being illegal citizens and in most cases having barely enough to live does not allow them to go back. Some are afraid that if they go, they will not be able to return. Many women feel depressed and hopeless thinking their parents will die some day and they will not be able to see them again. However, most women want to stay in this country because they consider that here their children have more and better opportunities. In spite of the pain that being away from family members causes them, most of them prefer to secure a better future for their children. Their desire to stay in this country for the wellbeing of their children suggests the Mexican women interviewed tend to be self-sacrificing (Gutmann 1986).

A few women have gone to Mexico and then returned to the US. Soledad went back for a year and did not like it over there. She was unhappy with the amount of money she was able to make and did not like the fact that she was bossed around. That is why as soon as she could, she returned. In the case of Isabel, she went to Mexico only for the purpose of celebrating her marriage. After living with her partner

for 6 years and having children, Isabel was finally able to go to Mexico and get married. Although Isabel and her husband wanted to get married and there was social pressure put upon them to do so, they simply could not afford to go to Mexico. They simply had to save for years and wait for the best opportunity to come.

While the majority have made up their minds to stay, three of the informants said they plan to go back to Mexico. Pili and her husband decided they will go back because they find it risky to live here being undocumented. Their dream is to have their own business over there and become more independent. Olga has a one year old son. She does not want to stay too long in this country mainly for cultural reasons. She does not like the fact that in the US parents do not have enough freedom to raise their children the way they want. She pointed out: "Here, if you hit your child you can go to jail!" Olga is worried that if she stays her son might want to live independently when he is 18. Having her child in mind, she is also concerned with drug issues. Aside from these reasons, Olga and her husband want to go back in order to be around their parents. Luz wants to go back to Mexico because she is not happy here. She misses her family and the place where she grew up. Luz and her husband see their stay in this country as a sacrifice that will allow them to make some money so that when they return to Mexico they can have a better situation.

Americans

I asked the women to share with me their opinions about Americans. Some said they have found all sorts of people. Speaking in general terms, many find them to be polite and helpful and they say most of their experiences with them have been positive. Luz has blond hair and white skin; because of this, people tend to think she is American. She said that although there are a lot of illegal Mexicans, most Americans help them and make efforts in order to understand what they are saying. She also asserted that some are racists and get annoyed because they do not speak English. "They treat you as if they were telling you 'Why do not you leave this country? What are you doing here?'"

Most of the women have not established close relationships with Americans. Their social circle is basically integrated around Mexicans and in some cases, a few Hispanics. For most of them, their closest references are a few Americans they have met at Even Start. For the majority, Dee represents their closest bond with an American. During the interviews and focus groups the women expressed how much they like her and talked about their English teacher with great enthusiasm and gratitude.

As Bellah and colleagues (1985) suggest, the Mexican women who attend Even Start find that Americans tend to be individualistic in some respects. Once, when I substituted Dee, the women and I talked about cultural differences between Americans and Latin Americans. One of the things they said is that Americans do not seem to care for their parents. "They are too independent and individualistic," said one of the women. The subjects agreed that as parents they enjoy taking care of their children but at the same time they expect their kids to take care of them when they are old or when they need them. Another woman pointed out that some Americans just give material things to their children. "They do not give them

time or love. They just care for their work and are obsessive about making money. What can they expect from their children?" This woman also suggested Americans' attitude is contagious. She said that as a result of living in the US, Mexicans, start becoming only concerned with work and money; therefore, they start paying less attention and giving less time to their children.

The informants mentioned several examples that show that not all Americans are individualistic and that Americans have collectivistic values that can be hard to find among Mexicans. All the women agreed there are friendly and helpful Americans. Many recalled being in situations where Americans who did not know them helped them carry heavy bags. They said that in Mexico, it is unusual to find helpful people in the street. However, some disagreed saying that in their towns, people who owned a car used to stop and ask others if they needed a ride. The women's opinions show that, as Rosenberger (1992) states, every society has collectivistic as well as individualistic aspects.

Discrimination

A few of the interviewees reported to have had experiences where they felt discriminated against. Soledad was riding a bus with other coworkers. They were speaking Spanish and having a good time. There was an older man in front of them who was listening. When they got out of the bus he also got out and told them they had behaved improperly. "He said that in this country we must speak in English." It is important to notice that the old man just needed to listen to them speak in Spanish to react in that way. In this incident, there were no personal issues involved but probably just fixed ideas and stereotypes.

Amelia also shared with me an experience that made her feel somewhat discriminated against, lonely, and mistreated. While riding his bike, her son fell, cutting his lip. Desperate, she took him to the closest clinic but there they told her they could not help her and suggested she should go somewhere else. She finally arrived at a hospital and a doctor helped her child. At that time Amelia did not understand enough English. The doctor asked her son if his mom beat him or if they had a car accident. The good side of this story is that the frustration she felt allowed her to gain courage to become more independent. She realized she needed to learn more English and have a better understanding of how things work and where she should go in case of an emergency.

Even though many of the informants acknowledge that Mexican immigrants tend to be discriminated against at a racial, political, and socio-structural level, for the most part the women interviewed seem not to feel looked upon in this country. Aside from the fact that it is hard for them to find a job due to their legal status and that the conditions under which they work are not ideal, few of the informants have felt discriminated against at a personal level.

Becoming independent

Being away from their families as well as being exposed to a more modern society and to a higher living standard, all the women have become more independent, strengthening their "individualized self"

(Roland, 1988). In spite of the fact that their children and partners are their priority, throughout my conversations with them I found being autonomous is something they value, seek, and feel proud about. Patricia says that by living in this country she has gained self-confidence. Being by herself and assuming that she has to deal with things on her own has helped her become more independent. Part of the independence they have gained has to do with the fact that in the US they are able to do things that they would have most likely not been able to do in Mexico. As an example, in this country many women have learned how to drive a car.

At the same time, their acquired sense of independence would most likely make it hard for many to live in Mexico. That was the case of Soledad when, after working in this country for a couple of years, she went back to her town. She had trouble at work because she did not like the distrustful and controlling attitude of her boss. She was not happy either with the low salary she could make which entailed depending on relatives and not being able to support her mother. As a consequence, as soon as she had the opportunity, she came back to the US. In the case that the informants would decide to go back to Mexico, it would be more feasible for them to adapt to Mexican society if over there they could have a similar lifestyle as the one they have in this country.

Although all of them have achieved higher levels of independence, they feel limited by their illegal status. Many would like to study or find a better job but they know that their expectations cannot go too far. The ones that have children who were not born in the US are also extremely concerned with the fact that they will not be able to go to college. Some commented their husbands are tired of working to benefit others and said both of them want to free themselves from rigid schedules as well as from the pressure of having a boss and getting paid what others consider is enough for them. For these reasons, some families are saving money in order to return to Mexico and set up a family business.

Being away from their relatives as well as exposed to cultural diversity, some women have been able to make their own choices regarding religion and spirituality. The fact that after being in this country some women have been able to decide what to believe has to do with the moral independence that Giddens (1991) and Dumont (1986) point out as a characteristic of modernity. Laura for instance became an Evangelist in the US. She argues that because of traditions it would have been hard for her to change her religion in Mexico. Although in this country their relationship with God has become more intense, Maria and Patricia changed many of their religious conceptions and thus decided not to go to church. Because they have a lot to do during the weekends, Olga and her husband decided to go to church once every two weeks. And finally, Amelia decided not to go until her kid is old enough to behave properly during the service.

In the case of some of the women, being in this country has given scope for the enhancement of their "spiritual self" (Roland, 1988). Pili for instance mentions that feeling lonely encouraged her to get closer to God. She said that now she puts Him before everything else. Patricia said in Mexico she went to church because she was supposed to do it. At mass she was usually bored thinking about when it would be

time to leave. Here, being free of religious traditions and social pressure allowed her to reflect on her religious beliefs, follow her instinct, and have a different relationship with God; as a consequence, she strengthened her spirituality. Silvia felt the need to get closer to God after giving birth. However, she decided to go to church not only because she was concerned about her spirituality but also thinking that in that way she would be able to meet other Hispanics. Like in the case of Silvia, other women have made social contacts, and thus extended the network of support they have in the US, by meeting people that go to their church.

Compadres and Comadres

Compadrazgo is a tradition held in Hispanic countries that allows people to extend their intimate social network, and thus to strengthen the “familial self” (Roland, 1988). Someone becomes a *compadre* or a *comadre* when they are named godfather or godmother when a child is baptized. In the eyes of God and society, the individual becomes responsible for that child and makes a lifetime commitment. In general, the *compadres* are expected to give emotional and material support to their *ahijado*, the child they are now responsible for. This in turn strengthens the link between the child’s parents and their *compadres*.

In Latin American countries *compadrazgo* has been carefully followed especially by people who live in the country, who come from more communitarian societies, and who tend to follow traditions. When people from the country move to big cities they usually lack influential social contacts as well as economic means; thus, many use *compadrazgo* as a means to cope with the difficulties they find in hierarchical and discriminatory societies. Often, they try to choose *compadres* among people who are in a higher socioeconomic position hoping that with that support their child will be in a better situation than their own. Because of the intimacy that characterizes the bond between *compadres*, people also use this institutionalized bond as an opportunity to establish close relationships with people they particularly like. In this way they make their life more enjoyable and find support that helps them cope with reality.

Through the institution of *compadrazgo* the interviewees of peasant background have built tighter bonds with the people they have encountered both in Even Start and in church. Isabel comes from a hamlet in Mexico and was raised in a religious and tightly bonded community. Currently, she has her own occupation and responsibilities as a mother, a student, and a wife. She devotes her extra time to trim the hair of family members and relatives. Because of the closeness of the bond with her *compadres* she also trims their hair. This shows how *compadres* are often integrated as if they were part of the family.

Maria and Amelia are *comadres* which means that the strong link between the two exists. They are neighbors, sit together in class, share secrets, and help each other as much as they can. In their case, as in the case of many, the support they give each other is equivalent to that given by a family member and similar to the support modern people seek when they visit a therapist. The fact that the interviewees continue the tradition of *compadrazgo* has to do with what Giddens (1991) says about the search of intimate relationships in modern societies. Although the informants live with their families, the lifestyle they have

here contributes to make them feel lonely. Aside from the fact that they were used to having close friends in Mexico, being away from their original communities, most of the interviewees feel the need to establish close bonds with friends.

Nature and Community

As Paz (1995) argues, coming to the US has meant for many of the subjects not having a close relationship with nature. Since most of them come from small towns located in the countryside, they were used to living in open, quiet, and peaceful spaces surrounded by crops, trees, and hills. In Mexico, most of them lived in small communities and did not have to deal with a land paved with cement, traffic, city violence, pollution, agglomerations, malls, or consumerism. Their life was rather simple. Pilar says little things used to be enough to make her feel happy. She remembers that once in a while her mother would buy her things like a barrette and she would be very excited about it.

Those who used to live in the country said that in their towns everything was within walking distance. When they needed to buy something they just went to the store around the corner to get it. They used to see cars only once in a while as they passed by the nearby highway. Probably because they were children but also because of the spirit of the communities they lived in, they were not afraid of rape, crime, drugs, or robbery. In most cases they knew all the people in their communities and felt safe and protected. Isabel said that in her hamlet people moved freely without being concerned with social threats. Now she has learned to distrust people, and because of the things she learns through the media she worries for her children's safety. She said she wishes her kids could live the way she did.

I was a bit surprised when the word *encierro* (seclusion) was repeatedly mentioned by many of them as we talked about their experiences in the US. As Dumont (1986) and Giddens (1991) mention, one characteristic of modernity is people's separation and control of nature. Evidently, this alienation has consequences on the self. Luz, who wishes she could go back to Mexico, commented: "You feel so good in your little town...the smell, the trees...everything is beautiful. Here we are secluded. Over there you go out to the street and you feel free." When I asked what she does during the weekends, she referred to the routine Giddens (1991) finds characteristic of modernity. "It is always the same. However, one gets used to anything."

Among the best memories some of the women have is when as a family they gathered together and while the adults talked, they spent their time playing with cousins and siblings in the open field. Even those who lived in big cities treasure the moments they spent in the country. Silvia—who grew up in Mexico City recalled: "When we were children we used to go to the forest to spend the day with my mom's relatives: my aunts, uncles, and cousins. It was not the same to play inside your house as it was to play in the woods. It made a big difference not to be secluded in your house."

Laura and Silvia grew up in Mexico City; Soledad did too for a few years. In their cases, seclusion characterized their lives. Their parents distrusted people and were concerned with the dangers

that can be encountered when living in big cities. Being little girls they were almost obsessively protected from the potential trouble that being on the street entailed. Soledad was not even allowed to play with her neighbors and, with sadness, she remembered that as a child she spent most of the time inside her house. Although when they lived in Mexico City they were more affluent, Soledad remembers she was really shy and sensitive. However, when they moved to their parents' town, being in contact with nature, surrounded by relatives, and able to move more freely, her self-confidence increased. She believes that urban seclusion made her feel shy.

Changes in Gender Roles

After living in this country and as a result of her life experiences, Maria has lost her shyness and become much more independent, assertive, and daring. Some time ago her husband wanted to drive while being drunk. Maria did not let him do it and he started insulting her. Seeing that Maria was so determined in her decision, he started pushing her against the wall. Maria yelled at her neighbor and asked her to call the police. She did, and as a result, he was arrested and had to spend two months in jail in addition of paying a fine. Maria suggested her husband has been feeling threatened by the fact that she has become more self-sufficient. As they were struggling he told her: "I am the one who makes decisions here! You feel you are so important and think you can do everything by yourself!" Maria explained to me he feels she does not need him as she did before. Although it was hard for Maria to let her neighbor call the police, she does not regret it, considering that her partner changed his attitude.

Maria's anecdote confirms that men use violence in an effort to take back the authority and power they are losing because of social and economic changes (Bourgois 1996). Maria's husband makes very little money and works at night. Although Maria does not work, her acquired sense of autonomy, the schedule her husband has to put up with, and the fact that his salary only allows his family to satisfy their basic needs, are all things which contribute to his sense of frustration. In his case, alcohol consumption, occasional use of violence, and frequent bad mood have been the outlets he has chosen to express the discontent with his situation as well as with Maria's new independence.

Typically, Mexican men do not do any sort of domestic work. Guttman (1996) says that economic factors are leading men to do more domestic chores than what their fathers and grandfathers did. However this does not seem to be the case for the majority of the subjects. When asked if their husbands help them at home, most women said no. Considering that men work outside, the interviewees feel it is fair that they do not have to deal with domestic activities. Both Olga and Patricia said their husbands help them sometimes by taking care of their children while they do other things. They argued that their husbands like doing that and that this is already a big help for them.

In spite of the occasional help they get from their husbands and the fact that they have become more independent, most women still play the traditional role of wives and mothers and feel this is the way it should be. Any type of domestic activity their husbands do that implies crossing the traditional gender

division of labor makes many of the women feel guilty and undeserving. Due to the short period I had for conducting research and due to the fact that I talked with the women and not to their partners, I do not have enough information to tell whether the men that do more at home behave that way as a result of being influenced by American society and lifestyle or not.

The female Mexican immigrants I interviewed came to the US hoping to improve their socioeconomic situation. Because of the things they heard and fantasized about the US, many thought things were going to be easier. Although the help of relatives who were already living in this country allowed many of them to get established, they encountered several difficulties. Due to the strong bonds with family members, separating from them was already a challenge.

In spite of the fact that some came with their partners and that the majority were living with their relatives, during the first months, most of them felt depressed and lonely. Aside from being away from their parents, in the case of many, they were for the first time estranged from the physical environment where they had lived for years. Being away from people, space, and culture, the women experienced a temporal loss of identity. Because they did not speak English and due to their illegal status, most also had a hard time finding a job.

In spite of the difficulties, coming to this country has been a positive experience for the interviewees. Being away from family members and being challenged by modernity, they have achieved greater levels of independence. This is currently a quality they value and keep trying to develop. After years of hard work and sacrifices, the socioeconomic situation of their family has improved. Their husbands work, they have a place to live and both they and their children are receiving education. Having in mind the future of their children, most of them plan to stay here as they consider that space for self-improvement and socioeconomic advancement is greater in the US.

So the readers may have an idea of who the interviewees are, where they come from, and what they think about themselves, in the next chapter I will refer to the major life events and cultural aspects that have played a role in shaping the interviewees' selves and identities. I will discuss as well what their self-views and autobiographies tell about Mexican society.

CHAPTER VI SELF-ESTEEM AND IDENTITIES

Self-Esteem

According to Harter global self-evaluations refer to “the overall evaluation of one’s worth or value as a person” (1999, 5). Global self-worth can be predicted based on people’s sense of competence in domains deemed relevant by them and on the support they perceive they get from significant others (Harter 1999, 198). The women interviewed give major importance to the social and the cognitive domains. With very few exceptions and considering differences of competence between domains, the women are satisfied with their performance in each of those spheres. For the most part, the informants also perceive support from significant others.

The social domain

For the most part, the informants maintain good and close relationships with others, and thus, tend to feel competent in this domain. They like interacting with people and they feel others like them. Throughout their lives they have developed skills that allow them to make friends, maintain bonds, as well as give and receive support. For all of them, their families, and in particular their children are the most important aspect in their lives. This speaks to the fact that the “familial self” tends to be salient among Hispanics (Roland 1988). The women spend most of the time with their children; they enjoy their company, they like to take care of them, and find satisfaction in the fact that their children need them.

Most of the interviewees maintain good relationships with their husbands. They do things for them, following traditional gender role expectations, while their husbands work and provide materially. Although in most cases their partners do not participate in domestic activities, they tend to support their wives. Proof of this is that they have encouraged them to learn English and to attend Even Start. Their husbands find it crucial for the informants to be with their children. Although there might be cultural reasons for them to want their wives to stay at home, this may also signal that their partners acknowledge the women’s competence as mothers and as housewives.

Important relationships in their lives and sources of support are as well the ones they have with their relatives, particularly their parents; and their friends, being in most cases the friends they have made at Even Start. The women find a sense of pride in being good daughters and in taking care of their parents. Although they are far away from them, they communicate often, and when possible, they send them money. Those of the informants who have relatives in Corvallis tend to visit each other frequently. Whenever their relatives need support, be it emotional or economic, the women and their husbands do whatever it takes in order to help them. Most of the subjects have made close friends among the women who attend the program. At Even Start, they spend time talking to them, and often, during the weekends, they see each other. The women tend to be loyal to their friends and do as much as they can to cheer and help each other.

The cognitive domain

Most of the women are currently satisfied with their performance as students and this contributes to boost their self-esteem. In most cases, when the women started attending Even Start, their sense of themselves as learners was very low. Several causes explain why they felt that way. Many had had few years of education in Mexico, most had not studied for a long time, and many had been living in this country without being able to speak in English. For all these reasons, it took them a while to realize that they could learn. Once they overcame that mental barrier they started making progress and taking risks. Their satisfaction with their performance in the cognitive domain stems to a great extent from the fact that the more they learn, the more their sense of competence increases. The interviewees pointed out that now they understand much more English and that they are also able to interact with Americans more often. This shows how sense of competence in the cognitive domain results in a greater sense of competence in the social domain, enhancing their overall self-worth.

Caregivers and self-esteem

Gecas (1991) asserts that self-esteem is generally connected with the interpersonal domain and not so much with macro sociostructural aspects such as race and social class. Based on this research I found what Gecas asserts to be true. In spite of the fact that most of the interviewees could be categorized as lower class and that many have indigenous features, for the most part, they have positive overall self-concepts. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that the relationships that the interviewees had with others, particularly with caregivers, have played an important role in building their self-esteem. Proof of this is the fact that most of the women who were, for the most part, treated kindly by caregivers tend to have higher levels of self-esteem. On the other hand, the women whose caregivers tended to be rude and authoritarian, or that were constantly criticized or mistreated² by them in some way, present lower levels of self-esteem.

The behavior of the informants' caregivers were influenced, although not determined, by circumstances such as socioeconomic status, type of community they dwelled in, and whether they were raised in the city or in the country. This is said on the basis that among the women who were somehow mistreated by bitter and aggressive people, some were raised in the city, others in the country; one belongs to the middle class, others to the lower class; in some cases their parents worked for others, and in other cases, they lived on what their land produced. This is a sign of the fact that variables do not work

2. The word "mistreatment" can infer various levels of violence in different societies. In this case, the women used the word "mistreatment" to refer to being hit, punished, scorned, yelled at, ridiculed, embarrassed, compared to others, or criticized. In the US, the word "abuse" has become very popular to infer serious mistreatment. Except in the case of Maria, these women have not experienced mistreatment that could be categorized as abuse.

independently, and that it is the combination of aspects which build individual's self-esteem and shapes people's identities.

The cases of Silvia and Maria exemplify what was just pointed out. Although Maria was raised in the country and comes from a tradition-oriented community, she was often scorned and punished by her father. In the case of Silvia, she was raised in the city, and her parents had a comfortable socioeconomic position; however, her grandmother used to hit her grandchildren once in a while and she was rude, authoritarian, and too demanding. Central in explaining the use of aggression is the fact that cultural beliefs and practices such as the ones that have to do with hierarchies of age and sex have historical roots and are extended in Mexican society regardless of people's occupations, class membership, location, or type of society.

As I asked the Mexican women about their lives, most of them concentrated on landmark events and only few referred to their personal characteristics. The ones who did are for the most part the ones that have very high expectations for themselves and lower levels of self-esteem. As they shared with me anecdotes and main life events, they pointed out what they consider their negative qualities while they overlooked and undermined their virtues. I also found these women to be extremely concerned with what others think about them which in turn makes them to be constantly seeking approval (Harter 1999).

Although many of the informants were physically punished and verbally mistreated during childhood, for the most part, they felt loved. Aside from the fact that they were sheltered and their basic needs were satisfied, their relationship with family members was mostly characterized by interdependence and a strong sense of mutual responsibility. The fact that the majority maintains very close bonds with their parents and do not resent them suggests that, in their perceptions, the share of love was greater than the share of aggression. As a result, although some of the women's self-esteem is not as high as that of other women, there is not a dramatic difference, in terms of behavior, and accomplishments achieved, between the two groups.

Interpretation of life events

The way the women interpreted their life experiences and the roles and identities that they chose as they gave meaning to what they lived has had a central role in building their self-esteem. Proof of this is that not all the women who reported being mistreated have lower levels of self-esteem. The fact that some women were more vulnerable to episodes of aggression than others probably has also to do with the roles they adopted as they interpreted their experiences. Since they were little girls, the informants chose roles such as fighter, victim, or heroine. The women who tended to put the blame on themselves and that identified with the victim's role were much more affected by mistreatment than the women who blamed others or who found explanations for aggression on social and cultural phenomena.

In many cases, the women stuck to the role they first identified with. As a result, they have crafted self-narratives assuming the perspective that would allow them to play that role over and over.

Considering that roles and identities have opposites and relate somehow to their contraries (Burke 1991), in the case of the women with lower levels of self-esteem, their tendency has been to bounce from the role of victim to that of heroine. In the case of the women who had more harmonious childhoods it seems to be easier for them to assume roles that do not create so much tension and suffering.

The following examples reveal the importance that interpretation of life events has on determining levels of self-esteem. Luz's father was a drunkard, mistreated his wife, and did not express love to his children. Luz mentioned she was often mistreated by her older siblings who were jealous of the proximity between her and her mother. Even though she and her mother were actually very close, Luz said that her mother used to be rude with all her children. In spite of her father's attitude, of the conflicts she had with her siblings, and of the occasional bad temper of her mother, she always knew and felt they loved her anyway. The stories she shared with me suggest Luz has a deep sense of self-confidence that allows her to avoid assuming the victim's role. As a result, Luz's overall self-image tends to be positive.

In the case of Pilar, self-reflection (Giddens 1991) seems to have played an important role in avoiding episodes of aggression to have a negative impact on her self-esteem. Pilar's father was very distant and she never had a close relation with him. She said her mother used to yell at her or spank her for insignificant things. Although at that time her mother's attitude hurt her a lot, and at first she seemed to have adopted the victim's role, later she realized that most mothers were that way. Because of the way Pilar interpreted her mother's behavior, she does not resent her. Being a mother herself, she has also been able to see things from a different perspective. "Now that I have my children I know that sometimes I make mistakes. When I feel desperate the easiest outlet is to spank or yell at them." Her assumption that her mother's aggression was common in her society as well as the reflexive processes she engaged on as time has passed, have prevented her from letting aggression affect her self-esteem. In the case of some of the women whose self-esteem was affected because of episodes of violence, as Pilar, they have also been able to see things in a different way, and often, to forgive the person that mistreated them. Coming to the US has been central in their reflections. Being lonely and away from family members has allowed them to distance themselves from their experiences, and thus, to re-interpret life events.

Positive self-images

In spite of individual differences in terms of levels of self-esteem, the fact that the interviewees are cheerful and hopeful about the future, both consequences of self-esteem according to Harter (1999), speak to positive self-images. As they shared their stories with me, I could see, although in different degrees, pride for their achievements, courage, self-confidence, willingness to improve in different areas, and strength. The fact that they are responsible, joyous, and that they enjoy being around other people suggests as well that they tend to view themselves positively. The fact that they are participating in the program also suggests that their self-images are healthy. Women with very low self-esteem would most likely not have the courage to attend Even Start.

One of the aspects that has contributed for the informants to build mostly positive self-images and to feel competent in domains is the fact that they developed self-control. Due to the nature of relationships between family members in Mexico, the subjects grew up sharing with their parents and siblings responsibilities as much as joys and difficulties. The interdependence that characterized their relationships helped them develop different qualities, self-control being one of them. Twenge and Baumeister (2002) give special attention to self-control because it allows individuals to achieve goals. In these authors view, outcomes lead to self-esteem rather than self-esteem leading to outcomes.

According to Gecas, people try to enhance their self-concepts while they avoid the opposite side of the self-esteem continuum which is characterized by depression as well as feelings of worthlessness and self-contempt (1991, 175). The things the women do to maintain and enhance their self-concepts speaks to positive self-images. For instance, in an effort to project the best image before Dee and their classmates, they comply with all their responsibilities as students and when they participate in class, they always try their best. During our conversations, they referred to their positive qualities and only a few mentioned their defects; however, neither one referred to herself denoting self-aggression. The informants mentioned some of the things they do and have done to overcome feelings of depression. Some got closer to God, others got closer to friends and family members. Many said they devoted more attention to their children. Isabel mentioned that when she feels depressed, she tries to get her mind busy because she does not want to affect her children with her issues.

The case of Maria

Due to the history of mistreatment Maria was subject to, her global self-worth is not as high as that of her classmates. As I have mentioned, Maria said that during her childhood her father mistreated her. The fact that her parents did not treat her in the same way they treated her siblings had made her believe she is probably the daughter of another man. Later on, as an adolescent, Maria was subject of extreme physical, sexual, and emotional abuse by her partner. Some years after leaving him, she fell in love with a man. They have been together for about ten years and have three children. Throughout these years, she suggested she has been often mistreated by her partner. Maria said she usually does not feel supported by him. As a consequence of her negative experiences, Maria appears more fragile than her classmates.

Harter's (1999, 175) findings suggest that individuals with lower self-esteem perceive themselves as incompetent in specific domains and perceive lower levels of support from significant others. In spite of the fact that Maria has had negative experiences with men and has not felt supported by them, she has an excellent relationship with her children. In addition, she has made close friends at Even Start and her classmates appreciate her and seek her company. The fact that she has not felt approved and supported by men but has great relationships with women and children suggests that within domains there are different areas, contexts, and relationships; and that people may feel more competent in some areas than in others.

In this sense, it is inappropriate to speak in general terms of the sense of competence a person has in a domain.

Self-esteem, authenticity, and self-efficacy

Gecas (1991) contends that both self-efficiency and authenticity are necessary to maintain and build a positive self-esteem. While self-efficiency is related to the sociostructural domain and has to do with people's sense of internal and external control, in his view, authenticity has to do with commitment to ideologies and identities. Talking about self-efficiency, I would say that the informants experience more internal than external control. As women, they were taught to be stoic and passive; as a result, they developed self-control. However, at a sociostructural level, their position in the landscape as well as the beliefs, values, and social standards they have come to internalize do not allow them to have much control of external aspects. Aside from being poor, the fact that they are illegal puts them in a situation where they cannot expect anything from American society and where they can hardly do anything to change their circumstances. In addition, because of their gender, they are in a disadvantaged position not only with respect to Mexican or American society but also in the relationship with their partners. An example of this is the fact that those of the informants who have a job, do the second shift at home. Because of their beliefs in regards to gender role expectations they do not challenge their husbands and they let social expectations lead their lives.

With regard to authenticity, I found the Mexican women to be authentic in the sense that their self-identities reflect the communities they come from. While I observed the women, I did not see them, at any point, pretending to be Americans, but rather the opposite. As Paz (1985) argues, I would say the women insist in the aspects that make them Mexican. Proof of this is the fact that most of the subjects are consciously making efforts to maintain their traditions and their culture because they want to pass them on to their children. On the other hand, in spite of the fact that they have incorporated aspects of American culture into their self-identities, their beliefs and behavior correspond for the most part, to those of their social class.

The "ideal self"

Giddens highlights the importance of the "ideal self" as it allows the individual to organize its autobiography and give direction to its identity (1991, 68). The women interviewed have an "ideal self" usually not too distant from the self-concept they already have. However, all of them want to improve in one way or another. One thing in which all of them coincide is that they want to become proficient in English in order to improve the quality of their lives in this country. This includes becoming more involved in their children's lives, helping them with academic issues, getting a job, as well as becoming more independent and feeling good about themselves.

Areas in their lives they perceive need to be strengthened become motivations for self-enhancement. Pilar who did not go to high school feels embarrassed when her children ask her questions related to academic issues and she does not know the answer. This is why she would love to become more educated. Amelia and Laura recognize they are often impatient and irritable when interacting with their children and they would like to be more loving and kind. I found Soledad and Silvia, who have lower levels of self-esteem, to be particularly critical of their characteristics as mothers. Soledad mentioned she is too dependent and nervous, and that she worries too much, while Silvia said she is bossy, hysterical, loud-mouthed, over concerned, and perfectionist. In both cases their children represent a source of anguish and concern as much as of pleasure, pride, and love. Although they did not state it clearly, their self-criticism and the way they feel about their defects suggest they would like to be different.

Giddens (1991) argues that reflexivity with regard to the body is characteristic of modernity. In relation to their "ideal self", most of the informants seem to be satisfied with their bodies and their physical appearance. Although many of them have some extra pounds, they tend to joke about it and eat what they like without paying attention to things such as number of calories, as many Americans do. A few are concerned and have been working at changing their eating habits because of health and aesthetic considerations. Maria believes her children are going to be proud of her if she becomes thinner. In her case, it is the concern with others' opinions what motivates her to lose weight.

Sources of Self-Esteem

Twenge and Baumeister (2002) say people's achievements lead to self-esteem. I found this to be true in the case of the interviewees. In addition to the accomplishments they have achieved, as I interacted with them I could perceive the pride and joy they feel when they refer to the positive traits they and others recognize in them and when they talk about the difficulties they have overcome. They tend to be modest when they talk about such things but undoubtedly, achievements and characteristics perceived as successes and strengths have had a fundamental role in building their self-esteem. I also found that relationships with significant others have a considerable impact on their sense of worth.

Because of the centrality of masculine figures in Mexican society, feeling loved by and loving a man as well as getting married has had a great impact on how the women view themselves. All the informants were expected to have boyfriends and to get married and this was something they looked forward to since they were little girls. The ones that at some point in their lives did not feel loved by their partners reacted feeling depressed about it. During the interviews, the subjects expressed excitement when they shared with me the stories of how they met their partners. This signals the fact that they tend to romanticize the relationship with their couples. Currently, most of the interviewees encounter comfort and satisfaction in the relationship with their partners. The ones that do not have a harmonious relationship with them tend to worry about it and feel undeserving.

In spite of the fact that in Mexican society women tend to be mistreated (Gutmann 1996), or probably in an effort to compensate for this, motherhood tends to be idealized. Be it for cultural, emotional, biological reasons, or for all of them, the fact is that the informants find a great deal of pleasure in assuming the role of mothers. Their children and their accomplishments reflect favorably on the mothers and their efforts, and thus make the informants feel especially proud. Aside from their kids, the relationship with their parents and other relatives also represent important sources of self-esteem. The support they give to and receive from them are central in providing them a sense of connection with their ancestors and their past. In addition, maintaining close bonds with them allows the women to experience a sense of continuity, and thus of psychological stability (Stryker 1980, Howard 2002, Friesen 2002).

Having close friends is a significant source of self-esteem for most of the interviewees. Before attending Even Start, many of the subjects were experiencing isolation. Although some have relatives living in Oregon, for the most part they used to spend their time at home. The ones who work or go to church did not give much importance to the friends they have made there. Even Start represented for most of them the opportunity to make friends among other Mexicans and to be able to relate to them on a daily basis. Aside from the pleasure that they get of belonging to a group, interacting with other women allows them to relax. Considering that the women have so much in common, they tend to find support, console, guidance, and joy when they are around their friends; and this enhances their self-esteem. Because at Even Start the women learn English and have the opportunity to be with other women, Even Start is also a significant source of self-esteem. I will expand on this topic in the next chapter, when I focus on the role that the program has on the women's self-views.

Having migrated to the US and to be living here with their families are things they feel very proud of, and thus, represent significant sources of self-worth. Talking from a general perspective, crossing the border has meant separating from their relatives, learning to live more independently, and adjusting to a different culture. In order to live in this country, the women have had to work, learn new skills, learn some English, and become acquainted with social rules as well as with the physical space so that they can move around. Having been able to accomplish all these things has strengthened their self-concepts and has allowed them to improve their sense of 'self-efficacy' (Gecas 1991). Considering the lifestyle, level of education, and material conditions that characterized the lives of most of them in Mexico, these achievements are in fact big accomplishments.

In the case of the women who went through extreme difficulties in the past, they tend to feel even prouder of the accomplishments made after migrating. Laura, for instance, experienced poverty during her childhood. Her social background and her lack of higher education were things she felt ashamed of; because of this, she often felt inferior. When Laura and her husband left Mexico, they lived in a community that had no electricity and no running water. After years of hard work in this country and after overcoming a lot of barriers now they finally live independently with their children, own two cars, and have enough money to fulfill their needs. During the interview it became apparent that Laura feels extremely

proud of both her and her husband's professional and economic achievements and in general of their current life style.

As a result of living in the US and of the things they have accomplished by being in this country, expectations for themselves as well as for their families are much higher now. The fact that they are learning a second language has empowered many of them to want to learn other things. The ones who do not plan on studying a career are either working or want to find a job. There are also a few who have in mind owning a personal business. All of them want their children to be able to chose a profession and go to college. Because in most cases their kids were born here, the women think their children will choose to stay in this country and be able to achieve greater things than they have.

To Silvia, the higher social class she belongs to is a source of self-esteem; she feels proud of her social background in a different way than the other women. Most of the informants expressed joy as they recalled specific aspects of their families and lives such as the relationship with their parents and siblings, the place where they grew up, and some of the things they used to do. Silvia, however, finds a sense of pride in being different from her classmates, in her current living standard, and in her ways and level of education.

Mexican Society

Based on what I observed in the interviewees as well as on their personal narratives I am going to refer to what their autobiographies and behavior tell about their culture. While a few of the informants grew up in big cities like Mexico City, most were raised in small farms or towns in the country. The former were exposed to greater levels of modernity and social stratification while the latter lived in more egalitarian societies where traditions were stressed and where daily contact with nature, religiosity, and communitarian values were characteristic. Most of the interviewees are of peasant origin and thus, most of them were categorized in their country as lower class. Although the majority did not experience extreme poverty, for the most part they come from modest households.

In the case of all the women interviewed, their families are at the core of their lives. As children they spent most of their time with their parents, siblings, and to a lesser extent with other relatives and friends. Aside from fulfilling their obligations as students, most of them assisted their parents with daily activities. They used to help their moms or caregivers to take care of younger children and to perform domestic work while the ones that lived in the country also helped their parents to raise and take care of animals and to perform agricultural tasks. In spite of mistakes and problems typical of human interaction, the time and dedication their parents gave to them made them feel for the most part loved, supported, and taken care of.

Familial unity and lack of excessive concern with material things contributed their being able to build in them a strong foundation that allowed them to become cheerful, reliable, and responsible adults. Because in most cases they felt they were central in their parents' lives, now, as mothers and daughters the

women try to give back what they received. A strong sense of reciprocity makes them feel responsible for their parents and that in turn creates in them a desire for compensation. In the case of some women it is clear how since their adolescence their parents were their priority. Soledad for instance said that she preferred to be around her mom and dad instead of visiting with friends.

Luz said something similar. As a child she loved to make friends and be around people, but as an adolescent she used to spend most of her time with her mother. When she fell in love with her husband she had a very hard time deciding whether to marry him or not because being the last child she felt guilty for leaving her mother alone. Aside from the fact that she was very close to her mother and did not want to leave her alone, Luz had to deal with the social pressure that has to do with the old tradition portrayed in the Mexican movie "Like Water for Chocolate." According to this tradition, younger daughters must remain single so that they can take care of their parents.

Even though all the women finally left their homes, migrated to the US, got married and formed their own families, their parents still have influence in their lives. Of all their family members, they miss their parents the most. The way they feel about them, added to the fact that they are far away from them, makes them fear their death. The mother of Isabel as well as the fathers of Maria and Laura died while they were here and this generated in all of them deep depression. After learning that her father had died, Maria says she got drunk for several days. It was especially hard for her to accept his death because of the victim-aggressor bond they had and because she was forced to come to this country and had not seen him in more than 13 years.

Things the women currently do show how tight the links with their parents are in spite of the physical distance and the time they have not seen each other. They talk to them on a regular basis and when anyone is in trouble, the other feels as if it were their own problem. A few of the informants support their parents materially or at least send them money whenever they can. Some consult with them before making important decisions. A few plan on returning to Mexico out of a sense of mutual responsibility; they want to be close to their parents and take care of them. In general, communication between them represents a source of mutual support, comfort, and encouragement. In the case of many women, their parents are also a motivation to live and improve themselves, and in many cases the sole reason they have to return to Mexico. It is also true that temporal, physical, and emotional distance leads them to idealize their relatives, no matter how dysfunctional their homes were. This idealization contributes to the repetition of the reciprocity pattern.

Although family is central in their lives, establishing relationships with others is for most of them very important as well. Considering that Mexicans tend to foster social contact no matter where they are, being in this country increases their need for interacting with others and particularly with people who belong to their same cultural universe. I found most of the women to be polite and friendly; after exchanging a few words it is easy to feel comfortable around them. Particularly during social events, a spirit of generosity and good will reigns and they appear cheerful, friendly as well as humorous.

Considering that the interviewees' lives tend to be routine, social encounters are vital as they bring social and individual harmony, and as they allow for repressed energy to be liberated (Paz 1995). During fall and winter 2002-2003 I had the opportunity to join them and observe their behavior in a few birthday parties and celebrations. Their children were also there. They served them some food and then let them go play with the other kids while they spent their time with adults. Aside from interacting with others, central in these events was their wonderful homemade food. People did not eat too fast and almost everybody indulged in seconds. At the end, they distributed what was left, asking who wanted to take what. Many of them like the idea of taking food home so their husbands may try it. The way they behave in these contexts reveals the importance that sharing and interacting with others has for them. During these special occasions I found the women to be especially joyous and willing to socialize. The fact that most of them spoke and laughed louder than usual signaled their enthusiasm. The identities they display while in parties suggest that while in celebrations they tend to bring the best there is in them while often hiding vulnerabilities.

Mexicans tend to protect their private life (Paz 1995). As a result of negative experiences, a few women told me they do not trust others and simply keep things to themselves. However, I found most of the interviewees enjoy sharing their intimate life with relatives and close friends. Because some think that opening up with family members often brings trouble, they prefer sharing their opinions and experiences only with friends or with people they barely know. This probably explains why, during the interviews, many women had no trouble sharing their lives with me.

Unless they are with someone they feel completely safe with they do not share secrets, fears, difficulties, prejudices, or personal opinions that may jeopardize group harmony or that may make them feel uncomfortable. The fact that three of the women interviewed shared with me things they had not even told their husbands speaks of this tendency to hide things from people they are closely linked to in order to protect their own inner self and avoid conflicts. The need to liberate what has been repressed often times gives way to gossip. Other times, because they do not want to talk about themselves, they end up talking about others. As in any social group, gossip in turn leads to distrust generating a cycle of miscommunication that ends up creating social conflicts.

In an effort to hide their intimacy, the women tend to conceal what they are actually feeling. While doing participant observation I noticed that when scared, nervous, or in trouble, many of them pretend nothing is happening. Although Maria has difficulties learning English, she used to spend a lot of time chatting with other classmates during class. When Dee asked questions to the group her face seemed to say "I am tough... I am not interested in what they are saying or doing." Later on, when I interviewed her, I found out she did not want to let others see her weaknesses. On another example, Soledad appeared cheerful to me; nevertheless, when we talked she said she is usually stressed, nervous, and anxious. I noticed some women tend to be shy or feel embarrassed when they are surrounded by people they are not

completely familiar and comfortable with. However, they usually smile and try to look as if nothing is happening.

The importance that people have in their lives and the interdependence that usually characterizes their relationships also foster their concern with others' opinions. Because social interaction is so frequent and close, getting others' approval seems to be more important for them than to people who belong to societies where independence is encouraged. Often times I found they tend to shape their selves in order to fit in the group and satisfy others. Many of the women I talked to during the interviews and focus groups told me how much it bothered them when their classmates talked with their friends in class. In spite of this, when I observed them, the majority behaved as if it did not bother them at all.

Socioeconomic stratification

Occupation, ethnicity, level of education, and family name are among the aspects that people take into account to define class membership in Latin American countries. In spite of the fact that Latinos are the product of racial mixture, they tend to associate ethnicity with social status. In Mexico lower class is made up, for the most part, of people whose indigenous traits tend to be salient. Indigenous features are more apparent in some of the interviewees than in others. Although all have indigenous blood, because of racial mixture, many could be categorized as white. Most of the interviewees could be defined as lower class especially because of their socioeconomic background, occupation, level of education, income, and illegal status.

Except for the women whose fathers worked their own piece of land, the parents of the other interviewees earned a meager salary by doing things that, although indispensable, are socially regarded with contempt. Some of those activities included milking cows, taking care of other people's farm, doing construction work, and watching for others' safety. A few men also lived for years in the States and made some money mainly as farm workers. During the interviews I noticed in a few of them shame when they mentioned their parents' occupation. That was the case of Pili who said her father was a construction worker as well as the case of Luz and Soledad who said her mother, in Luz's case; and her father, in Soledad's case, earned their living by selling the milk of their cows. When I asked about their fathers' occupation some women, including Silvia, avoided specifying what their fathers did and only referred to the city or town where they used to work. A few women who did not seem to feel ashamed of their social background but rather proud were those whose fathers worked their own piece of land in the country.

The way many of the women dealt with this topic signals that in Mexico certain occupations are regarded as dirty, inferior, or of lower status. This also suggests that, as it is the case among Americans (Bellah et.al. 1985), Mexicans tend to categorize and discriminate against or value others based on what they do. Except for Luz, the interviewees were not ashamed to mention their mothers' occupation, housewives in most cases. This reflects the fact that most women come from a social milieu where it is socially accepted, and some times even encouraged, for women to stay at home. It is interesting to notice

that due to the predominance of patriarchal ideology in Mexican society and to the way distribution of labor is organized, people tend to expect more from men as well as to pay much more attention to the kinds of things they do to make a living. The nature of the relationships between family members and the importance that Mexican society affords to those bonds explains as well why people tend to judge, categorize, and treat an entire family group based on the occupation of the male head of the house.

Class differences have had a great impact in the women's lives. Socioeconomic conditions as well as cultural background determined their level of education, social contacts, and opportunities for the future. The women who were raised in modest and traditional households in the country or in small towns were not encouraged to keep studying. The same happened in the case of Laura who grew up in the city but who belongs to lower class. This limited their options for the future as well as their personal goals and expectations. Because they lacked powerful social contacts, they had to start from the beginning in order to have anything. They married poor men and with great effort have been able to improve their situation. In spite of the fact that Silvia also married early, her level of education and exposure to cultural diversity has given her a broader perspective on life. As a result, she tends to have higher expectations for herself than the other women do. Silvia had important social contacts because of her parents' status. Because of this, she married a middle class well educated man. Without particular effort on her part, Silvia has a comfortable socioeconomic position.

In spite of the consequences that social hierarchies have had on the interviewees, the women who were raised in the country are not as concerned with class membership as those who were raised in the city. The fact that class hierarchies were more stressed in the capital, where the gap between the rich and the poor is drastic, explains this to a certain degree. In the case of the women who come from the country they usually lived in small towns and most people in their communities had a similar socioeconomic position. Farming activities, social interaction, and practice of religious traditions were their communities' primary focus. Because of this and because acquiring material things was not a priority for their parents, they did not grow up being particularly concerned with what others had. In the case of the women who come from Mexico City, as they dealt with antagonism and competence between social groups, they were constantly aware of and affected by class differences. At the same time, they were more concerned with material things considering that possessions also determine social status.

Laura was raised in Mexico City and experienced extreme poverty as a child. The difficulties her family went through originated to a great extent from class differences and struggles. Her father was a construction worker and earned very little. To add some money to the meager family budget Laura's mother used to wash other people's clothes. In an effort to demand a better salary and better social conditions for people of his class, her father was often on strike. For these reasons they often experienced hunger and were deprived of basic things. Her parents used aggression against each other as well as against their children as an outlet to express their frustration. Laura's performance at school was low because she could not concentrate; she said she was constantly thinking about food. All these affected Laura in the

various spheres of life and had an impact on her self-esteem. Among other consequences, she learned to feel inferior to others and often thought she was undeserving.

Very few women suggested they felt discriminated against because of their social status. Pilar, who was raised in a small hamlet in the countryside and whose father was also a construction worker, said: "*En la escuela yo era muy humilde*" which means something like "At school I was considered of lower status." According to her, they treated people according to their parents' socioeconomic positions. However, Pili said this affected her only when she was little. "As I grew, I understood that we are all the same. It has always bothered me that people value you depending on how much money you have. I tell my children that we are all equal and that the external part only covers our "true selves." Pilar's assertion reminds us that the self is, as Giddens (1991) argues, a 'reflexive project' under continuous change.

By living in this country most of the informants have found relief in terms of social class distinctions. Part of the reason why this has happened is because they tend to live surrounded by friends, relatives and other Mexicans or Latinos. In some cases, they live in areas where the population of Hispanics is so high that they do not even feel the need to learn English. In addition, the few Hispanics they know belong for the most part to their same socioeconomic status. Aside from their estrangement from Americans, many hold the common beliefs that in the US everybody is equal and that middle class is the only class.

Another reason why they tend not to feel looked upon here has to do with cultural differences. A few said that something they like about living in this country is that people are not too concerned with others' physical appearance. In Mexico, they had to pay attention to every detail of their image, particularly when they decided to go out on the street. Many of them want to stay and live in the US because of their children; underlying their desire is their intention to free them from social class differences.

Except for Silvia, the majority of the women who attend Even Start have either peasant or lower class background. In general, they get along well. However, as it happens in every society, they tend to seek for the company of people they identify with. The groups they have made at Even Start usually include women with similar status, background, education, and interests. In spite of the fact that Silvia like other of the women, has indigenous features, she feels she is different from most of the people that attend Even Start. There is a certain air of superiority in her that seems to yell: "I am not like them, I am different, I am special!" Silvia's need to differentiate herself from the other women and her fears of being identified with the rest of the group reflect the values of a social class that needs to justify its position of privilege.

The way she dresses and behaves make her appear a bit different from her classmates. She wears more expensive and formal clothes than them. Underpants, high heels, skirts, make up, and died hair are some of the things that characterize her physical appearance. The fact that she was raised in a big city and exposed to more years of formal education also contributes her being more articulate than many of her classmates. Meanwhile, the other women tend to present themselves as they are. They wear informal clothes, often jeans, and none or very little make-up.

Considering that the difference between people of different socioeconomic backgrounds is obvious in Mexico but not in the US, Silvia fears being seen as one of them and being labeled as low class. One of the things she mentioned is that she has, among her friends, women whose husbands study at OSU. One of them participated at Even Start last year and the other one is currently a student. In spite of the fact that they were raised in the rural area they are both professionals with college degrees. Although Silvia and her friends do not have similar racial configurations and come from different social backgrounds, their level of education as well as their current socioeconomic status bonds them together.

Hierarchies of sex and age

In Mexico, hierarchies of class, sex and age not only organize social life and determine distribution of labor but also foster aggression and exploitation against the sociostructurally weakest. In the more traditional communities, where most of the informants come from, men are still responsible for making money while their wives are expected to stay at home. Partly because of traditions but also due to the fact that their children are too young to be left by themselves, most of the women who attend Even Start do not work. However, considering the expenses they have and the fact that their husbands' salaries are barely sufficient to satisfy their families' needs, most of the informants plan to work in a few years.

Some women suggested the responsibilities they have as housewives and mothers are often overwhelming. Many resent their partners for their patriarchal attitudes. Based on what the women said it seems most of their partners tend to think that child care and house duties are exclusively female responsibilities. One of the women said: "My husband can see me drowning between my children's demands and my daily activities and he does not move a hand." She referred how she was trying to cook while holding her crying baby; meanwhile, her husband sat down watching her unperturbed as he was waiting for her to serve him his meal.

In spite of excessive work and lack of support from their husbands in terms of housework, most women assume their female responsibilities and do not complain about it. To a great extent they do what they are supposed to because that is what they saw their mothers do. Because there is almost no flexibility in the types of duties expected from each gender, the women tend not to ask their husbands for help. In the few occasions where their husbands cross boundaries and step on their field the women feel their partners are doing them a favor. Although Gutmann (1996) argues that machismo is to a great extent a stereotype held by Americans about Hispanics, I find that their husbands' attitude and the way the women react to it reveals that machismo is a dominant trait of Mexican society.

Since they were little girls, the tasks and behavior demanded from them were generally different from the ones demanded from boys. Because her mom worked, Silvia had to wash her brothers' clothes, heat up their food, and in general prevent them from doing any sort of domestic work considered to be a woman's duty. She mentioned she had to do it because she was the only girl. In her case, since she was a kid she had to take on the role of mother. Assuming the responsibilities and obligations tied up with that

role came to shape her sense of self. Because gender distribution of labor is part of social discourses, practices, and beliefs, for the most part the informants internalized the cultural values they were raised in and assumed machismo and gender inequity as natural.

Men are not only freed from doing domestic work or taking care of their children but they also tend to be regarded as indispensable figures in a women's life. Regardless of social class, feeling loved by a man represented, and in many cases still represents for the women interviewed one of the major sources of self-esteem. Olga and Silvia mentioned that some years ago they underwent severe depression when their boyfriends stopped showing interest in them, and it took them a while to recover. In some cases, because they have not found in the relationship with their partners what they expected, they have tried to compensate by addressing their love and attention to their children.

Because of gender role expectations, specific characteristics are fostered in and associated with each gender. In Mexican society, as in many others, masculinity tends to be linked with strength and power. God and Jesus are for the interviewees the main authorities in their lives, followed by fathers, husbands, uncles, brothers, and sons. Although most of them pray to and have faith in the virgin, all of them conceive God as masculine and regard him as the supreme deity. Isabel, who comes from a more traditional and religious society addresses her prayers to the saints, who are male as well. In spite of the centrality of male figures in their lives, they tend to go to women and female figures when they are looking for help, support, and understanding. This seems to be the case for most Mexicans; this is why Paz (1995) asserts that the poor and suffering go to the *Virgen de Guadalupe*.

During their childhood and adolescence most of the women feared and respected their fathers while they usually had a closer and more relaxed relationship with their mothers. Except for Isabel and Amelia, both of peasant background, who said their fathers were joyful and playful, the other women remember their fathers as serious and distant. They used to go to work and they hardly spent any time with them. In the case of most of them, both in the relationship with their mothers as well as with other women, they have been able to feel accepted and comforted. A few women asserted their mothers allowed them to make their own decisions when they had to make significant choices in their lives.

From what the interviewees said and from what I observed, it seems most women in Mexico internalize social expectations and incorporate feminine roles and identities. However, age hierarchies explain why in Mexican society it is not unusual for women to use aggression as a means to control and educate children and adolescents. A few of the informants referred to episodes of violence and exploitation that took place during their childhood where women were the aggressors. Laura said her parents, and particularly her mother, were harsh with her and her siblings. Aside from age hierarchies, extreme poverty and its consequences –hunger, social discrimination, depression, and hopelessness- must have played a role in her mother's attitude.

Silvia's case also points to the fact that not only men are violent and controlling. She and her family used to live in her grandmother's house. During their childhood Silvia and her brothers were often

scorned and beaten by her. Silvia said she was always telling her what to do and loading her with domestic work in spite of her age and academic obligations. Now as an adult Silvia can't help but to be as demanding with herself and with others as her grandmother was. Her desire to please others and the high expectations she has of herself are sources of continuous suffering and anxiety in her life.

Three of the women interviewed commented that aside from being rude with their children, their fathers used to mistreat their mothers. I will refer briefly to the case of Luz and then to that of Soledad. Her father was a drunkard, did not work, and mistreated her mother constantly both emotionally and physically. He inherited a piece of land and an old farm and argued throughout his life that that was his contribution to marriage and that he did not need to provide materially. Because of his harshness, the relationship between him and his children has always been distant. Luz resents him because of all this and because he has never recognized his faults.

Soledad's father also mistreated his wife on a constant basis and was an alcoholic as well. Soledad said he spanked her until she was thirteen. She recalled she used to stay still while he punished her. However her brothers used to run away trying to avoid being hit. This difference in behavior within the same context signals the fact that passivity and stoicism are traits encouraged in and expected from women (Paz, 1995). Although Soledad did not like the way her father treated her mom and in spite of his bad temper, she says she felt emotionally closer to him than to her mother. The way Soledad feels about her father suggests that episodes of aggression do not necessarily interfere with sentiments of love, admiration, and respect.

In spite of their fathers' attitudes and the fact that they were often mistreated by them, Maria, Soledad, and Laura were especially fond of them. Their fathers passed away while they were living in the US and they lamented their deaths profoundly. They said their attitude hurt them; however, as time passed and they reflected about their relationship with them, they were able to understand and forgive them. Aside from the psychological dependency that arises between victim and victimizer, the love and admiration that these women feel for the paternal figure signals the centrality of men in Mexican culture. Their feelings towards them suggest as well that the share of compassion was greater than the share of aggression.

Two of the interviewees reported being physically and emotionally abused by their husbands throughout their marriage. After years of conflicts and disenchantment, they have strengthened themselves. Both women regard their relationship with their children as central. Amelia for instance said that before, she was really concerned with the possibility of losing him. For years she tried to please her husband so he would not leave her. She affirmed that lately, probably because the years passed, she does not care any more. Although she still seems to love him, she has realized she does not need him that much. She even suggested her life would be easier in many respects if he would leave them. As for Maria, she tries to focus mainly on her children but her partner's attitude hurts her and somehow she still expects love and romanticism from him. At the same time she has become each time more independent from him and this is a reason why now he resents her.

As authorities, men usually have the last word. When Maria was an adolescent she was punished by her father because she did not want to eat. Maria's father probably associated lack of appetite with being in love and this infuriated him. He did not allow her to join the family during their meals. She was only allowed to eat a couple of corn tortillas a day. Her mother had no say and could not help her. The terrible punishment lasted a few days and, aside from feeling miserable, Maria lost a lot of weight. It was only when her brother and cousin interceded that her father decided to bring an end to the punishment. Maria's anecdote reveals as well the supremacy that men tend to have in Mexico.

Although things have changed, hierarchies of age still exist in Mexico. They dictate respect and submission for those who are older. The sole fact of being adults is for many enough to demand love and consideration and to become unquestionable authorities who know what is best for their children. Implicit is the idea that younger people are not as wise as the elder and that they must listen, obey, and subdue to their will and authority. This explains partly the level of power that adults feel entitled to use when they deal with children. Their position in the age hierarchy and the fact that their life depends to a great extent on caregivers makes of them vulnerable targets. The fact that violence is regarded as natural in Mexican society and that children's and adolescents' position in the social landscape is disadvantaged explains why adults tend to mistreat the younger.

As long as there is the need to control, subdue, and oppress others, there is the need to use strength and coercion. In that sense, hierarchies of class, sex and age bring aggression with them. Considering that those hierarchies have existed in Mexican society for centuries, violence has become to a great extent socially accepted. As I have said, many of the subjects mentioned they were physically and emotionally mistreated by caregivers during their childhood. In many cases, their parents or other adults who were around them used to be rude, critical, and offensive as they interacted with them. Some of the women who come from more traditional societies mentioned they had teachers who used to hit, yell, ridicule, and embarrass their students.

Laura remembered with rage the fact that her mother used to make her feel dumb and incompetent. She gave her the same message so often that she incorporated it in her sense of self (Cooley 1902). Although her dream was to study, she did not think she could do it. Frustrated, she got married to a man she did not love and had a baby she did not want. This led her to repeat the cycle of violence she had been a victim of. Except for Maria, Laura, and Silvia, the other women talked about milder and occasional episodes of aggression during their earlier years without giving too much importance to them. Although extreme violence is not the rule, the women's narratives suggest disrespect and aggression were present in different degrees, and often in subtle ways.

One of the subtle ways in which most of the informants felt mistreated by their parents is through lack of communication. Underlying their attitude is the belief that as adults, they shouldn't explain things or ask for the opinion of their children. Some of the women mentioned how their parents did not take the time to explain important things to them. Topics such as sex were taboo and even more so in the case of

women. Laura who got married very early said she wishes her mother would have explained something to her so that the first sexual experiences would not have been so traumatic. In some cases, the women's parents made decisions that affected their children's lives without discussing with them before. Patricia, for instance, said her father spent most of his life working in the US in order to be able to provide materially for them. She considers he should have asked his children what they really wanted. She wishes he would have spent those years with them.

Soledad's anecdote points again to lack of communication between parents and children. Underlying it is the belief that as authorities, parents are the ones who make decisions. Being just a little kid and without any explanations, her father took her one day to her aunt's house, who lived in a different town, and left her there. Although her father went to visit her once in a while the experience was very hard because she missed her family and, most of all, because she did not understand why she had to be there. In addition, she did not like her aunt, who was not particularly tender, and at her house she had to wash her clothes and do other things she was not used to doing. After a few months, when they saved enough money, her parents and siblings moved to the town where she was. Soledad thinks that this episode has had an influence in her ever since; as a result of the sense of abandonment she experienced, she lost self-confidence and became distrustful.

I was able to see the women interact with their children at Even Start. Most of the time they were kind and tender with them. Based on what they said and particularly on their behavior it seems many have reflected on their life experiences and in many cases they try not to repeat their parents' mistakes. Patricia insisted that parents must respect their children and that a way of doing so is by fostering dialogue. Pili said her parents never recognized their errors and this was something that bothered her a lot. That is probably why she tries to make a difference when interacting with her children. With a sense of pride she said that when she makes mistakes she asks her children to forgive her.

The cases I have mentioned show that as adults abuse younger people, as men mistreat women, and as the richer exploit and discriminate the poorer, patterns of violence are created and perpetuated while social suffering spreads around. The victims are always those that societies allow and promote to be the weakest. Aside from being segregated and mistreated they are required to do hard, routine, and tiresome work, and they receive no or very little recognition for doing it. Because aggression and exploitation are so extended they tend to appear as natural and necessary. In spite of the way women tend to be treated, they are for the most part the ones who hold societies together. The women's narratives suggest that women's courage, stoicism, and sense of responsibility allow not only for children and men to be fed and taken care of but also for families not to disintegrate.

Identities

People's identities are not only the result of social interaction, nor are they the product of specific or isolated circumstances but of the combination of all the aspects that make part of an individual's life

(Anzaldua 2003). Throughout my conversations with the women, and as I did participant observation, I found that, aside from the centrality that relationship with caregivers and significant others has had in shaping their selves, the women's identities have been influenced to some extent and in different degrees by aspects such as their socioeconomic background, the place where they lived, landmark events, the roles they have played over and over, and hierarchies of age and sex.

I am going to refer to some of the aspects that have played a significant role in shaping the interviewees' identities. However, it is important for the readers to bear in mind that my observations are limited and only suggestive for the following considerations: (1) Among the subjects there was not an equal number of women raised in the city as the number of women who grew up in the country. (2) The differences perceived among the informants might be influenced to some extent by the belief that living in the country and having been raised in small communities, not exposed to much modernity, makes people somehow better. (3) Although contrasts were established between the women having in mind particular aspects, there are always individual differences. In addition, people's identities tend to vary based on contexts. Bearing this in mind, I will let the readers judge for themselves the accurateness of these observations.

Caregivers

Typically, people come to internalize the identities of the people with whom they have held long-lasting relationships (Blumstein, 1991). Due to the fact that during childhood one is more vulnerable to others' influence, the identities of those with whom the women constantly interacted at the earlier stages of their lives are salient. As I interacted with the women I could sense in their personalities some of the same traits they were describing as characteristic of some of their family members. The women who appeared in my eyes particularly relaxed and joyous had a father or a mother in whose case those qualities were salient. The converse also happened; the women who tend to be stressed and to criticize themselves and others had a parent or a relative that was often rude, impatient, and critical. Taking into account that people play an active role in the configuration of their identities (Burke 1991) it is important to mention that the women did not simply take on their relatives' identities. This is why, neither one of them is exactly as the influential father or mother they described to me.

To exemplify, I am going to mention Isabel's case. Isabel grew in the country, in a small community of peasants. Her father owned a piece of land where he grew all sorts of vegetables and fruits. They were not rich but they had plenty to eat, and all their basic needs were covered. Isabel speaks of her father as a particularly joyous and hard worker. She said they used to help him with agricultural activities and because of the way he was, helping him was fun. She said her mother was extremely kind and patient, and that religion was central in her life.

Compared to the other women, aside from being an excellent student, Isabel is one of the most joyous. She tends to see the positive side of things and her comments usually make others laugh. She takes

life in a relaxed fashion and feels very proud to be the way she is. When she interacts with her kids, she is for the most part kind, but once in a while, when they do not obey her, she is rude. She follows religious traditions carefully, and, as her mother used to do, she often prays to the saints. Her case shows how she selectively internalized aspects of the identities displayed by her parents as well as from other people. Considering that her parents treated her very kindly, the fact that she is rude with her children once in a while may suggest she adopted this behavior from what she has perceived people do in her society.

Place of origin

Rosenberg points out that people's identities are shaped by "the immediate social and environmental contexts" (1981, 593). Because culture is tightly bonded with physical space (Downing 1996), I find the location where they were raised has had some impact on who they are. The sense of joy, freedom, and peacefulness that the women from the country experienced as they lived in contact with nature is apparent in their identities. In the same way, the fact that the women who were raised in the city were not allowed to move freely, did not have much contact with nature, and spent most of their time in closed environments tends to manifest itself through distrustful and less open behavior.

The women who come from subsistence farming economies seem to be more open, humble, humorous, and calm than the women raised in the city. There's an air of freedom in the way they laugh, speak, move, and, in general, behave. Many of these women also enjoyed a relaxed and harmonious life with their families during childhood and adolescence. Because they lived in small and traditional communities, people knew each other and it did not entail much risk for kids to be on the street on their own. They spent their time in contact with nature and were surrounded by their parents, siblings, and other relatives. One of the aspects many of these women lament is that in their societies education was not deemed too important. As a consequence many of them did not finish high school and got married when very young.

Differently from what took place in the case of the women who grew up in the country, those who were raised in the capital had more years of formal education and had a greater exposure to the media as well as to cultural diversity. As a result, these women are more articulate than the women who come from the country. Because their parents worked they spent part of their childhood with other relatives who raised them stressing on neatness. The dangers that living in a big city entail played a role in the fact that caregivers controlled where they could go and with whom. Considering that socioeconomic differences are drastic in Mexico City, these women witnessed on a daily basis the cultural gap between the rich and the poor. In the case of Silvia, whose parents were not rich but had enough to provide for their kids, she was somehow privileged by social stratification. In the case of Laura whose father was a lower class worker, she was negatively affected by socioeconomic inequity.

Identities and landmark events

As mentioned above, landmark events have had an influence on their identities as well. For most of them, getting married, having children, and migrating to the US are among the most important happenings. Many of the women interviewed find their lives changed completely since they got married or started living with their partner and especially since they had children. In most cases marriage represented separating from their families, learning to be more independent, assuming adult responsibilities, adjusting to different relationships, and playing new roles. Two of the women suggested marriage made things easier. Olga met her husband in the US. Before she met him she used to live with her sister. Talking about how marriage changed things for her she said: "I am happier now. Before I used to go to work; at night we ate together [with her sister and her family], and then I used to go to my room. Now, it is different" [she said this with a big smile on her face].

For the women, having children meant a drastic change. Somehow they lost the freedom that had characterized their lives but for the majority this became irrelevant compared to the joy, love, and strength that their children generate in them. Their role as mothers is salient and has a significant influence in defining their identities. Considering their children's ages (in most cases under 8) and the responsibilities that motherhood entail, the women devote most of their time to performing that role. Aside from being their main responsibility, their children are sources of pride and pleasure. For most of them they represent strong motivations to do things. Many have chosen to stay in this country because they think that by staying here their children will have better opportunities. Most do not work because they have realized that a salary does not compensate not being with them. Some women find in their children an extra motivation to learn English. Pili for instance mentioned she wants to learn English so that she can help her children with homework. In general terms, the women's lives are organized, both in the short and in the long run, to satisfy and accommodate their children's needs and schedules and so that they can spend time with them.

Although most are married or live with a partner, due to the preponderance they give to motherhood and the responsibilities it entails, their identities as wives have become secondary. Because taking care of their children is their main responsibility while their husbands' obligation is to provide materially, most of them have predominantly focused on their role as mothers. Most women maintain a relationship of interdependence with their husbands and with all the differences and incongruences dictated by sex hierarchies they tend to find support in each other. Because of the values with which they were raised, the women I talked to believe in monogamy and expect faithfulness from them.

Except for Maria, most of the interviewees have been here around 7 years. Although only a few of them acknowledged they have changed considerably as a result of migration, all of them said they have become more independent by living in this country. Although many have relatives in this country and they try to support each other as much as they can, the American lifestyle does not facilitate this. In Mexico, because they lived in small communities and people were not as busy, it was much easier for them to ask for help, advice, or support. The fact that most of them often could not count on their relatives to help them

out in difficult situations made them become stronger and forced them to solve problems by themselves. As they overcame difficulties, they also felt each time more empowered to conquer new goals.

Stryker (1980) argues that playing certain roles and occupying certain social positions contribute to the sense of continuity of the self. In Mexico, the informants played roles in relation to their family members (i.e. daughter, sister, and niece) and they had a certain position in their communities. Because the roles the women played and the identities they displayed were intimately connected to others' positions and identities, coming to this country entailed for the interviewees losing their sense of stability and having to revise and rebuild their sense of self. In this country, most women gave priority to their roles as mothers and wives. Those who worked had another reason to become stronger as well as more independent and courageous. By focusing on their children and husbands and by developing certain personality traits, the women gradually regained a sense of stability. Proof of this is that they overcame their identity crisis as well as their feelings of depression and were able to adapt to their new reality.

Although the women's identities reflect Mexican society, the fact that they have had to adapt to a new culture, lifestyle, as well as to higher levels of modernity, has led them to negotiate changes. The interviewees have had to unlearn some habits in order to incorporate new ones. For instance, when they interact with Americans, they must be careful and not invade their physical space; whereas in Mexico, they did not have to pay much attention to this. Another example is that instead of having their main meal during lunch time as it is in Mexico, here they have it at dinner, when their husband comes from work and all the family can be together.

As Rouse (1992) suggests when he speaks about Mexican immigrants, the changes the women have made and are making in their lifestyles signal the fact that they are taking on the values, beliefs, and habits of other social groups. As mentioned earlier, when I talked about cultural differences with the women, one of them suggested that by living in the country, Mexicans start adopting Americans' values. She said that Mexicans also start giving more importance to work and money, instead of devoting time to their children. As Appadurai (1997) argues, this suggests that as a result of migration, the women are changing not only their values, ideas, and consumption habits, but also the way they relate to others.

The "polychronic" (Hall 1983) character of their identities is still salient. Their families and friends are still a priority for them and they keep doing several things at a time. Proof of this is that while they are in class, they interact with friends and at the same time try to pay attention to Dee. However, in this country they cannot rely on others for help and they have to fulfill their obligations (as mothers, wives, and students) on their own. As a result, the women have no choice but to devote more time and attention to the performance of tasks. This also means that more and more often the women devote less time to social interaction.

The fact that the women are changing patterns of consumption is a sign of their desire to enjoy the benefits of people of higher social status. For the most part they still eat the kinds of things they were used to eating in Mexico; however, little by little American products occupy more space in their kitchens. Once,

I saw Olga feeding her baby a Gerber puree. I commented that instead of giving that to him, she could make a puree with a raw banana. She said: “Yeah, I should probably be doing that.” The fact that she gave her baby processed food and that at the same time she is aware that she could give him plain fruit, suggests there are many voices within her that agree and disagree in a dialogic way (Hermans 2002). In those voices, the need to maintain traditions is confronted with the need to make changes and to adapt to new circumstances.

Identities and social class

As Rosenberg (1981) states, the interviewees’ identities have also been shaped by their position in the social landscape. From all the women interviewed, probably Laura was the most defensive when she first met me. She was not welcoming, and her face expressed distrust and even rage. Intrigued by her attitude towards me, I decided to approach her. I mentioned to her how sweet her boy is. This probably touched her tender side. Gradually, she opened up. During our interview, when she described the poverty and suffering she and her family went through I felt that somehow she was directing at me the resentment she has against upper class people. Probably because the interview allowed us to establish a closer contact and because it enabled her to release some of her feelings, afterwards our relationship became smoother.

In the eyes of Americans, all Mexicans are basically the same. However, for people who come from highly stratified societies it is easier to read the subtle signs that differentiate one class from another. The way they speak, dress, move, eat, laugh; their interests, their values, their ideas, the people they relate to, what they expect from life: all these are part of people’s identities and all these say something about the cultural universe of the social class they belong to (Robbins 1993).

Middle class versus lower class

I am going to establish a contrast between the lifestyle of Silvia and her classmates to exemplify how their options and expectations vary as a result of differences of class, and how this shapes their identities. Silvia came to live in Oregon because her husband, a Mexican-American, works for the US army. While she has a legal status, most of her classmates are undocumented. Silvia completed twelve years of education and then went to college for a year but interrupted her studies to get married. While living in the States, she worked once for a few months because she was bored of being at home. During leisure time she likes to go shopping, even if she does not need to buy anything in particular. Her friends are educated people whose husbands are pursuing Ph.D.’s at OSU. In the near future, she plans to study, travel, and have her own business. She would like to become an interior designer or to own a fancy flower shop. She wants to do this in order to become busy, have fun, and because she thinks she would be good at doing that. She plans to go back to Mexico, if possible once a year, to visit her family.

In the case of the other women, except for three, the others did not go to or did not complete high school. A few are studying to get their GED in Spanish. Some dream about going to college, but because

of their legal status, they think that is impossible. A few are planning to study short careers. Patricia, for instance, would like to become a dentist's assistant or a social worker so that she can help other Mexican immigrants in the US. These women have worked out of economic necessity. For the most part, they have been hired as janitors or unskilled workers, and have been paid the minimum wage. Basically, the same applies to their husbands. One paints houses, some are cooks or work in restaurants, some work in industries as blue collar workers, and some are farm workers. During their leisure time, aside from being with family members and friends, many watch TV. Some watch Mexican soap-operas while others tune in on American shows to practice their English. They also mentioned they do things such as cooking something special, knitting or making clothes for their children, and going with their families to nearby places where they can be in contact with nature

The women who come from social positions regarded as low in Mexican society, and particularly those who were raised in the country, are less concerned with forms and appearances if compared to Silvia, and thus, there is a greater sense of freedom in the way they behave and express themselves. The fact that they were not exposed to many years of education contributes to their feeling inferior to others in this respect. Because many cannot study and become professionals, they feel frustrated, and seem not to feel as hopeful about the future as Silvia. Although Amelia is in her late 20's, she believes it is too late for her to start a career. When asked what would she like to do in the future, she replied "It is over, but I would have liked to study medicine."

These women tend to feel grateful for having a job. Although they do not feel as proud as Silvia for the kinds of things they and their husbands have done in order to make a living, they tend not to feel ashamed. This speaks of the humbleness that characterizes these women. What they do during leisure time, such as cooking, and knitting, reveals they keep doing the kinds of things they were used to doing in Mexico. This suggests they still maintain many of their traditions. At the same time, the options they have reflect their budget. In general terms, their values seem to be more collectivistic than those of Silvia. Proof of this is that the majority expect to live close to their children in the future. The things they tend to do during leisure time also suggest they give primacy to the "familial self" (Roland 1988).

In terms of their expectations, all the interviewees aspire to be in a better socioeconomic position. They seek to improve in different areas, and they want this both for their families and for themselves. However, I found Silvia's expectations and attitude to be more ambitious and individualistic if compared to those of the other interviewees. She wants to have her own business independent of what her husband does. Meanwhile, some of the other women had in mind the idea of owning a business as a family because that is something their husbands have been thinking of due to the hard working conditions they must put up with. As in the case of Patricia, some women want to work in order to be useful to others.

Silvia wants to travel and if possible to live in other countries. However, the other women only mentioned going back to Mexico or living close to their children. A few of them want to make a short trip to visit their families, but for the most part, because of their economic possibilities, this is mostly a wish. It

is clear that the interviewees' plans for the future have a lot to do with past and present material conditions as well as with the information they have access to. The fact that knowledge and level of education depend to a great extent on material conditions also explains why the interviewees have different expectations.

Identities and gender

The women's identities are strongly defined by gender role expectations. Paz (1995) says Mexican women tend to be passive, modest, shameful, and stoic, and to a great extent, I confirmed this is true. Their movements are for the most part delicate and there is a certain air of shyness in their behavior. At the same time, most of them are talkative and enjoy interacting with others. As I interacted with them I did not hear them yell, curse, say bad words, or talk about sex in a direct fashion. During our interviews and conversations I found them to be rather humble when describing themselves or when talking about their accomplishments. Olga worked for 14 years in a store in Mexico. After some time, she was promoted and was in charge of the whole store. Trying to find an explanation for this, she said: "Maybe my boss thought I was a good worker, or who knows."

The kinds of jobs they have done, the difficulties met during marriage and migration, and their willingness to live in this country for the wellbeing of their children indicate stoicism. If we consider that not acting or reacting often requires a lot of strength and courage, the impassiveness that Paz points out as characteristic of Mexican women, is also connected with the stoicism expected from them. Maria and Amelia keep living with their husbands in spite of years of conflicts and mistreatment. They are not happy with them; however, they do not plan on leaving them. Although this shows a level of passivity and stoicism, the fact that they depend on their husbands economically also plays an important role in their behavior.

The women are self-sacrificing (Guttmann 1996). Just like their mothers, they do as much as they can in order to facilitate things for others, particularly family members. Pili remembered how her mother used the same dress over and over for years. Whenever there was some extra money, she said her mother used it to buy something for her children. Pilar also mentioned her mother used to do domestic chores without complaining. She said that probably because of this, she has no trouble doing everything at home. In the case of all the subjects, they organize their lives in such a way that they can satisfy their family's needs and desires. Pilar works cleaning houses and likes this job because it allows her to spend a lot of time with her children. The fact that most women want to stay in this country for the wellbeing of their children also reflects their tendency to be self-sacrificing.

Although they could be categorized as active because they do so many things, the fact that they allow others to put too many burdens on them speaks of passivity. Lorena, one of the women who participated in the focus group, shared an anecdote that illustrates this. "The other day, we went shopping. I got out of the car. I was holding my baby and carrying two big bags. He had nothing in his hands. When I was about to reach the door, he asked: "Do you need help?" I said "It is too late!" Lorena, as many of

the other women, gets trapped into a vicious cycle. She does too much and does not ask for help. When others take advantage of this or take for granted her efforts, she feels resentful and assumes the victim's role. In an effort to make others feel guilty, she keeps on assuming too many responsibilities, augmenting her feelings of frustration and resentment.

The informants do the kinds of things that are expected in Mexico from mothers and from housewives. The way they were treated, the tasks they were asked perform, the roles they had to play, and the behavior that was expected from them have been central in the formation of their identities. As they grew, the interviewees mimicked the behavior and personality traits of the women who surrounded them. They played feminine roles over and over, and at the same time incorporated social standards and expectations into their selves and identities. Silvia said her grandmother taught her to do female chores: "She taught me how to cook, how to iron, she taught me to be a woman." Now that she is married, Silvia devotes a great amount of her time to doing housework. In spite of the fact that she did not like the way her grandmother treated her, Silvia suggested that as a result of the years they spent together she resembles her.

Some of the interviewees insisted on how much their parents protected them during childhood and adolescence. In the case of both Silvia and Soledad, mainly their fathers were the ones who took on the responsibility of taking care of them. They controlled their lives: who they could be with, what could they do, when could they leave the house and to go where, and so on. Being over-protected fostered in them a sense of dependency on their parents and a need to be protected, particularly by men. This explains why some have had such a hard time separating and being away from caregivers and why they give so much importance to the relationship with their husbands.

Giddens (1991) affirms that modernity forces women, more than men, to leave old and more traditional identities in order to confront challenges and take advantage of the new opportunities. Because of traditional gender role beliefs, the interviewees were expected to get married and then stay home to take care of their children. In their case, economic necessities have challenged those expectations. Most of the interviewees have worked and after their children grow up a bit more many plan to get a job. Another example of how they have left traits of more traditional identities is that in this country, most of the interviewees' have learned how to drive. In the communities where most of them grew up, very few people had cars, and only men drove.

As women, their options have been limited and this has had an impact on their identities as well as in their life projects. Soledad was so fond of her parents that she wanted to be able to provide materially for them so that they could live more comfortably. Aside from the fact that men usually earn more, she said the things she could do in her town were few since she was a woman. Because of her frustration, at some point she wished she were a man in order to be able to do more for them.

Even though their female identities push them to follow traditional gender role expectations, being in the US has allowed them to be different from what they would have been if they had stayed in Mexico. Due to their former socioeconomic position, the culture where they come from, and the reality of their

country, some of the things they do now would not have been possible over there. As the informants struggled to adapt to a different culture, they had to overcome fears and prejudices, as well as develop characteristics traditionally assigned to men. As a result of working and living in the US, the passivity Paz talks about is gradually transforming into courage and action. An example of this is that in the last conflict Maria had with her partner she found the strength to let the police arrest him.

Identities and age

The informants' youth also defines their present identities as well. Because of what they do and the many responsibilities they have I see them as doers. Their youth is also crucial in allowing them to learn new things and meet the challenges that living in a foreign country entail. In a way, it is as if things have started in their lives. They are young mothers, most of them between 25 and 35, with young children, and they have not been married for too long. At the same time they are making plans for the future and have the desire to do things differently from their own caregivers. Some women plan to study, many want to work and be helpful to others, and a few want to own a house and a family business in Mexico so that they do not have to keep accommodating to others' needs and requirements. The women who complained their parents did not explain things to them are making efforts in order to be more communicative with their children. While I was interviewing Patricia I saw how she took the time to explain to her 3 year old daughter why she needed to remain silent.

The women are at a stage where achieving goals and overcoming difficulties seem possible. This is why they make plans for the future and do not worry too much about the present. Although the fact that they are illegal is on the back of their heads, they are not particularly concerned about it and tend to think things are going to be fine. The fact that they are making progress with their English also encourages them to keep learning and to want to learn new things. Their achievements and the expectations they have for them and for their children, as well as being and feeling young, bring an air of optimism, joy, and aliveness to their identities.

Identities and their role of daughters

The fact that the interviewees also play the role of daughters has an influence in who they are, how they feel, and what they do. Many of the interviewees seem to have their parents constantly in mind; they often remember them, and although many have been here for years, many still miss them. Out of a sense of reciprocity many feel responsible for them. Soledad has asked her mother to come live here but knowing the routine that characterizes her children's life she does not want to. All that Soledad can do right now is send her money so she does not have to work. However, as other women, Soledad plans on going back to Mexico to take care of her. Luz has always been very close to her mother. In her identity, the role of daughter is salient. This is probably why her behavior makes me think of a little girl. She is sweet, joyous, and a bit shy and naïve. At the same time, there is something in her that calls for others' protection. The

proximity of the bond with her mother explains why when Luz delivered her baby, her mother came from Mexico to help her and stayed here for a whole year.

Collective identities

The women's collective identity is not exclusively based on their ethnicity. Although all of them are *mestizas*, neither one has marked indigenous or African features. This is probably why neither one identifies with any of the indigenous groups of Mexico. Most of Even Start's adult participants identify as Mexicans and only a few as Latin American as well. In general, they have among their closest friends other Mexicans, very few have Hispanic or American friends. This speaks of the fact that they tend to experience a sense of identity mainly with people of their own country. Even though I am Latina and mestiza, most of them did not see me as someone close to them from a cultural or ethnic perspective. The fact that I am a university student also played a role in the way they perceived me. They saw me as an alien and attributed me authority because of my educational level, and thus, particularly at the beginning, they treated me with distance. Probably because of their educational background, the majority were often surprised when I told them that in my country we have similar, if not the same, traditions.

In the case of the women who were born in the country, I found that many of them feel more identified with the towns or communities where they grew up than with their country as a whole. When I asked them where were they from, they said proudly the name of their little towns. The women feel a deep sense of belonging to their families and the places where they spent before coming to the US. Proof of this is the fact that when asked what they miss from Mexico, many mentioned their towns and all of them said their families. For some, Mexico seems to be a big and abstract notion. Once, while observing them in class, a group of women asked me what the capital of Mexico was. The fact that some women did not know it reaffirms the idea that their collective identity is linked to the reality they know.

In spite of the fact that many have been here for several years, for the most part they do not feel they belong in this country. This is something Paz (1995) stresses in his essays about Mexican identity. Although they have incorporated different aspects of American culture, for the most part they try to keep with their traditions and ways. The strong bonds they maintain with their country reveals they do not necessarily want to become Americans (Glick-Schiller, et. al. 1995, 56). The fact that they do not speak English fluently, their socioeconomic status, and their level of education does not allow them to integrate to American society. In addition, being illegal and not having the same rights as Americans, contributes to their feeling aliens. For all these reasons, as Paz (1995) says, the women seem to insist on their Mexican identities.

Variability in their identities

Their identities tend to vary and this depends to a great extent on the nature of the context as well as on who they are interacting with. When they are with Dee, who is joyous and humorous, they tend to be

a bit more joyous; and if they are introverted, they tend to smile more. Something similar happens when they attend a social gathering; they get louder and their excitement manifests itself through jokes, laughter, smiles, and openness. When they are among close friends they tend to speak about intimate things so they usually become more serious and use a lower tone of voice to share their confidences. In class, many of them are a bit shy and have a hard time speaking in English in front of their classmates. However, when they work in small groups or when a few women get together to talk, they tend to be more relaxed and extroverted.

In one of the occasions I substituted for Dee, and spoke most of the time in Spanish. Aside from their interest in the ideas we were discussing, the fact that they were able to speak in their mother tongue contributed for them to be really engaged in the conversation. In turn, this also encouraged them to interrupt often and talk with their neighbors about the topics being discussed instead of addressing to the whole group. The fact that the women were able to speak in their language gave place for a change in their identities. Except for the women who are very shy, most of them appeared more confident and outgoing. They spoke much louder, made jokes, and participated more than what I observed them do at Dee's classes. This suggests that speaking their mother tongue empowers them while speaking in English makes it hard for their "true-selves" (Turner and Billings 1991) to become manifest.

Summarizing

Self-Esteem

The way the interviewees were treated by caregivers, but particularly the roles that they have assumed as they interpreted life events have been key aspects in building their self-esteem and in crafting their identities. For the most part, the women who had harmonious relationships with family members tend to have positive overall self-views. In turn, the women who were more often subject to some form of mistreatment or who lived with rude, bitter, or authoritarian people tend to have lower levels of global self-esteem. Because of the way in which some of the women were treated, but particularly because of the way they interpreted these events, some seek to play the victim's role. As they give meaning to experiences, they tend to put themselves in that position often leading as well to self-fulfilling prophecies. Because roles are always related to their opposites (Burke 1991) the women with lower overall self-esteem tend to see themselves and behave, either as victims or as heroines. In the case of the women who had more harmonious childhoods, they usually stay in the middle, and assume roles that do not create so much tension and suffering.

As a result of assuming different roles in life and seeing things from different perspectives, many of the women who felt mistreated have found different interpretations for the way caregivers behaved. As a result, some do not see themselves as victims anymore. In the case of the interviewees, migration, time, exposure to modernity, and the loneliness that comes with it, have facilitated their self-reflection (Giddens 1991). All these circumstances have somehow forced them to distance themselves from their past and their

relatives, and allowed them to re-interpret life events, assume new internal roles; and thus, in most cases, to strengthen the bonds with caregivers.

The accomplishments they have achieved, their sense of competence in the social and cultural domains, and support they get from significant others are among their major sources of self-esteem. The level of internal harmony they experience depends to a great extent on the relationships they have with the people they interact with and on how good they feel they do things in different areas. Family, work, Even Start, and religiosity are central aspects in their lives. In each of these spheres, as they relate to others they display different identities and perform different roles. Because the nature of each context and relationship is different, the type of support they find in others also varies. While in their role of mothers and wives they basically give support, when they are among friends they tend to get support as they share with them their experiences. Aside from the pleasure that having friends entails, the women's lifestyle and the fact that they are away from their original communities explains why the relationship with friends is for most of them a significant source of self-esteem.

Identities

The women's identities are the product of a combination of variables. Among the most important ones are relationships with significant others (particularly caregivers), the type of society where they were raised, landmark events, social stratification, and hierarchies of age and sex. Considering that during childhood people is more vulnerable to others' influence, at the core of the women's identities are the behavior, feelings, and thoughts of the people that surrounded them as they grew up. The fact that the women incorporated some, and not all, of the identity traits of caregivers shows they played an active role (Burke 1991) in shaping their identities.

Depending on their age and because of their gender, a certain behavior was expected from them. As they grew up, the women incorporated identity traits of the women who were around them and internalized social standards and expectations associated with gender differences. From an early age they learned how to do domestic chores "in the appropriate way" and they learned that those were "women's responsibilities." As girls, they were often required to do extra work, benefiting men in particular and adults in general. Confirming Paz's (1995) assertions, most of the women studied have a tendency to be self-sacrificing, shy, modest, and stoic. Although they are active in the sense that they do many things, there is passivity in their behavior when they do too much in order to facilitate things for family members or when they let others mistreat them.

The place where the women grew up and the type of society they were exposed to had an impact on who they are. Two of the interviewees were exposed to greater levels of modernity as a result of being raised in Mexico City. Distrust and seclusion were among the aspects that characterized their lives. As a result, the women who were raised in the city do not appear as relaxed, open, and free as the women who

spent their childhood in the country. Considering that the gap between the rich and the poor is drastic in the capital, they seem to be more concerned with class distinctions and material possessions than the women who come from the country. In the smaller communities, class differences tend not to be as marked as in big cities, and partly because of this, the interviewees' parents did not give much importance to their children's education. The women who were raised in Mexico City had a greater exposure to cultural diversity, particularly through the media. Although they belong to different social groups, both of them are slightly more articulate than the women from the country. While the women who were exposed to lower levels of modernity display identities often characterized by communitarian values, the women who come from the city are a bit more independent and individualistic.

With regards to landmark events, for the majority of the women, among the most important ones have been getting married and having children. As a result of these experiences they have had to develop personal qualities, learn to play new roles, change their priorities, and adapt to different people and circumstances. Although most of the women are not aware of how living in the US is shaping their identities, all recognized that in this country they have become more independent. Now they do things and adopt behaviors that in their societies were typically performed and expected from men. I have in mind things like driving a car, helping their kids out in emergencies, and traveling by themselves. At the same time, they have had to develop personality traits associated with masculinity such as courage and determinism.

Although aspects of Mexican society are dominant in their identities, as a result of migration and exposure to modernity, the informants have been negotiating changes. The women try to maintain their traditions and for the most part they are successful at doing it; however, their behavior, values, ideas, and relationships (Appadurai, 1997) are gradually changing. The American lifestyle leaves them with less time for social interaction and forces them to be more task-oriented. Although family and friends are still central in their lives, and, as "polychronic" (Hall 1983) people, they tend to do several things at a time; they have no choice but to focus in order to fulfill their obligations as mothers, wives, and students.

As I have suggested, one of the most important aspects in their lives is their participation at Even Start. In the next chapter we see how their engagement with the program represents not only the opportunity to learn English but a vital space to reaffirm their sense of identity. I will also discuss the role that Even Start plays on their self-esteem and identities. I will look at how important Even Start is in their lives compared to other things they do. Finally, based on what the women said, I will refer to things the program can do in order to increase its participants' self-esteem.

CHAPTER VII EVEN START: THE ROLE THAT IT PLAYS ON THE WOMEN'S SELF-ESTEEM AND IDENTITIES

For several reasons Even Start plays a crucial role in its adult students' self-esteem and sense of self. Probably the most important and obvious one is that in this program the women learn English. In general terms, this enables them to communicate with Americans, and thus to become independent. Considering they live in this country and most of them plan on staying here for the rest of their lives, becoming proficient in English is vital for them. A second, and not less important reason, is that at the school they are able to be around other Mexicans. The fact that the women are living in a foreign country and that their opportunities to interact with friends, and in general people from their country, are so limited explains why the relationships they have established with their classmates tend to be so significant.

Learning English is in most cases vital for them considering that English is the basic tool they need in order to move around and be able to function independently in this country. The more they are able to speak it and understand others, the more autonomous and confident they become. By being able to communicate, the women, and more in the case of those who have been here for many years, have been able to experience a greater sense of control in their lives. Speaking English entails for many the possibility of having a voice within American society. As they become proficient in English, they gradually regain their integrity and feel they also own the right of being treated like everybody else. Before learning English they had to interact with Americans as if they were deaf-mute and, in certain occasions, as such they felt treated. In this sense, learning English for them has been like recovering from an illness that did not allow them to use all their potential and to be fully present.

As the women communicate in English they not only are able to interact with Americans but they project a different image before family members. In the past, because of the linguistic barrier, many of them could not participate in events organized by their children's school, and in general, it was awkward for them to interact with Americans. While their children were already speaking English, considering they were attending school, the women were not able to communicate. In the case of some, their children had to play the role of interpreters. In other cases, they had acquaintances who helped them in specific circumstances. When their children needed help with school work, their mothers could not help them. For all these reasons, the women did not feel comfortable with the image they were projecting before family members and this was also having a negative impact on their self-esteem.

By learning English, things are changing for the women and they are acquiring a greater sense of autonomy. Considering that their husbands devote all their time to work, most of them have not had the opportunity to learn English. Now, the women are the ones who often mediate between their families and American society. At the same time this means they depend less on their children and on the people they used to call for help. Some women mentioned how their husbands ask them to run errands for them and prefer them to be the ones that interact with Americans. Many women feel confident enough now to attend school events and communicate with their children's teachers. They are also able to answer their kids'

questions or guide them with their homework. These circumstances show how by being able to communicate in English a chain of positive effects is created. As the women feel capable, useful, and important, and as the opinion that family members have of them changes, the women enhance their self-worth.

In the case of some of the women interviewed, before joining the program they did not have the time or the opportunity to make friends and be around other Mexicans aside from family members. During the interviews many suggested that at times they felt extremely lonely in spite of having children and a partner. Although some have relatives in Oregon and many had made friends in church and at their jobs, at Even Start the participants have the opportunity to interact with friends and Mexican women on a daily basis. The fact that at Even Start the women encounter people who belong to their same socioeconomic status, has been central in allowing them to establish close bonds with one another. Being around people who are in a similar situation has helped them realize that most Mexican migrants are dealing with the same kinds of problems, and thus, that they are not alone.

Being around women from their same society is also beneficial in educational terms. Because they are all Spanish speakers, they tend to have similar difficulties when learning English and this facilitates Dee's work. In addition, the way they pronounce English is very similar and this gives them a sense of confidence when speaking. The fact that they learn as a group is very useful because in this way the women also learn from their classmates. In addition, being around others tends to motivate them to go further. Learning as a group is also fundamental for them because in that way they are able to feel they are moving towards an objective (learning English) as a group. In the case of the new students, the fact that their classmates have learned so much encourages them in their learning process. Luz for instance said that at Even Start she realized that if others had been able to learn English she was also going to be able to do it.

Alvarez (1987) argues that when migrants are able to be around people who share their same culture, they are able to adapt in a better way to their new reality. Some women mentioned what a difference it made in their lives to be able to interact with their classmates. Patricia suggested that being around the Mexican women brought harmony into her life. "Here we have the opportunity to meet new people and to have a social life. That makes me feel good with everybody and everything." In the case of Patricia we can see how having friends not only helps her adapt to American culture but also helps her deal with other aspects of her life. It is not only the fact that they share the same culture but the fact that they are going through similar difficulties what helps create community between them and gives them energy and strength to cope with their reality.

In addition, as Alvarez (1987) notes is the case of other Mexicans, the socio-cultural networks that the informants have been able to build through Even Start are allowing them to maintain their culture and to strengthen communal bonds. Proof of this is the fact that the women speak in Spanish, celebrate Mexican holidays, and whenever there is a celebration, they eat Mexican food. Alvarez found that in the US, Mexicans tend to reproduce the 'supportive patterns' that were central in the more traditional

communities (1987). As mentioned earlier, those of the informants who were raised in the country, and who were used to having *compadres* and *comadres*, have established relations of *compadrazgo* with some of the people they have met through Even Start, reproducing the 'supportive patterns' Alvarez talks about.

The types of bonds that the women try to create and maintain with the friends they have made at Even Start are similar to the ones they had with family members in their country. During the interviews, most of them did not refer to their friends in Mexico, and if they did, they did not give them the same importance as they did to family members. The isolation they experienced in this country has encouraged them to seek for intimacy among friends (Giddens 1991). Most of the women who attend the program have become close friends with some of their classmates. At Even Start they spend time talking and sharing their intimate life; whenever they can, they visit each other; and, as much as possible, they support each other. Silvia mentioned how in the US she has learned to value friendship. She noted that her friends (although a few come from a different social background) are now like her family.

Being around people of their culture and relating to others, as they used to do in Mexico, reminds the women who they were and how they behaved and felt. At the same time, by interacting with their classmates, some of the identity roles and identity traits they used to display in Mexico tend to arise or come from the back to the "front region" of their selves (Goddard 1959). Before attending the program many spent most of their time at home and interacted mainly with their husbands and their children. For them, it was at Even Start where they again had the opportunity to relate to people from their country, to make friends, and to be in an educational context. Being around other Mexicans, the women were able to immerse themselves once again in the world as they knew it and as they used to experience it. This in turn allowed them to experience a sense of confidence based on a certain continuity of self.

The way the program is conceived, but fundamentally, the way the women and their children are treated by Even Start's personnel makes them feel good about themselves and this in turn enhances their self-esteem. This is particularly so because the people who work at Even Start are Americans and as such, they tend to represent American society in the women's psyche. This takes place because, as stated before, most women do not have close relationships with Americans other than with the people that work for the program. As I observed Dee interact with her students I witnessed the extent of concern, respect, and appreciation with which she treats the women. She is so friendly and giving in her attitude that it seems she is one of the group. Because of the way people are treated at Even Start many of the informants have felt for the first time entirely welcomed in an American environment. This has also played an important role in boosting their self-esteem.

During the focus groups, many pointed out that one of the main reasons why they like the program is because it is family oriented. The majority are able to take English classes particularly because their toddlers are allowed to be with them or, in the case of kids ages 1½ to 5, because they join the program as well. Rita said "If they wouldn't take care of our children, I wouldn't come. However, at Even Start

everything is organized in a way that makes it feasible for us to participate. Other programs are meant only for adults.”

Considering they do not like the idea of leaving their children with people they do not know, only the situation that Even Start offers fulfills their needs and allows them to study. The women who have children under age 1½ must take their kids with them to class. In spite of the fact that these women usually have a harder time concentrating, they try to follow their teacher as much as they can and while they learn, they also benefit from being around other people. Often times the other women bring some relief to them by helping them take care of their toddlers.

At the program, the women also discuss parenting issues with their teacher and classmates. On occasion, they have special guests that come to talk about specific topics. This component of Even Start gives them the opportunity to share the concerns they have regarding their children’s development and their relationship with them, all this within the context of migrant families living in the US. In this way, the women get acquainted with information that helps them understand and relate to their children in a better way. During PACT (parent and children together time) mothers and their kids do art projects and share time while acquiring literacy skills. Through these activities, aside from receiving support, the women have the possibility of enhancing the relationship with their kids. When this is the case, their self-esteem is strengthened.

Even Start also represents for the women the opportunity to relax and take a break from their daily routines. At the program, they get their minds busy and are able to forget for a while about the things that concern them, i.e., having a tight budget, being undocumented, being away from their relatives. Soledad said that she likes coming to the program because it offers her the possibility to distract her mind. “I am the kind of person that tends to worry too much about things. I like to come to the program because if not I tend to be thinking again and again about my problems.” The fact that the Even Start participants are all women allows them not to be too concerned about having to display the typical behavior expected from women. By not being confronted by a male audience, the women have an extra reason to feel relaxed.

The fact that all of them are women, and that all of them attend the program because they want to learn English frees them, to a great extent, from concern with age and level of education. Because of this, at Even Start the women are often able to be authentic and to let their ‘true self’ arise (Turner and Billings 1991). As mentioned earlier, English works as an equalizer. Although Eugenia went to college, she has a harder time speaking and writing than participants who were exposed to fewer years of education. This has allowed many women to acquire confidence as learners and not to worry about their educational background. Because Eugenia is extroverted and is not too concerned with others’ opinions, she keeps participating and does not worry about making mistakes in public. In spite of the fact that the women’s ages vary from 22 to 38, they all get along well and little difference is made in the way they treat women of different ages.

Aside from learning useful and relevant things, at Even Start they usually have fun. Dee makes the class participative and includes varied activities to meet her students' needs. The joyous and informal atmosphere that Dee creates in class has helped the women to overcome their fear of speaking in English. Although some of them knew a little bit of English before attending this family literacy program, they used to feel embarrassed speaking it. Dee has done a wonderful job encouraging the women not to be concerned with what others say or think about their pronunciation. As a result, most of the women said they are now much more daring when it comes to talking to Americans or speaking in front of their classmates or other people.

The women who have a relatively good level of English and who are thus able to understand Dee usually leave the class feeling satisfied with their performance. As they accumulate learning experiences perceived as successes their motivation to learn and keep attending the program increases. In this way, Even Start has a positive role in their self-esteem and in their identity as learners. There are other women, especially those who are new or those who had none or few years of formal education in their country, who have a harder time understanding or learning English, and thus, following the group. In this case, it depends on the way they interpret and react to reality and on their self-views as to whether Even Start has a positive effect on their self-esteem or not.

Olga is one of the women who joined Even Start the second year (October 2002). During the first months she basically did not understand what Dee was saying so she was lost in class most of the time. However, Olga did not seem to be concerned with what others knew. She paid attention in class, took a few notes, and once in a while asked Dee and her classmates for explanations or meanings. During our interview she expressed her excitement with the English classes and said she is learning little by little. In the case of Olga she focused on what could help her learn English and gradually made progress to attain her goals.

Something different took place in the case of Maria. Because she did not have some of the basic tools to learn English, after a while, she started feeling frustrated because her learning process was hard and slow. In this sense, attending Even Start indirectly affected her self-esteem and particularly her sense of competence in the cognitive domain. During the interview, Maria said with tears in her eyes that she has difficulty to learn and that she was not feeling motivated to keep attending the program. Proof of her lack of motivation is the fact that while this research was conducted she was not attending Even Start on a regular basis.

In addition to having seen herself for years as illiterate and unable to speak English, her concern with others' opinions impeded her to take risks and make mistakes in class, limiting and blocking even more her ability to learn. Maria got easily trapped in a vicious cycle. Not participating in class meant not learning as much as others. Not learning as she wanted in turn meant feeling inferior to her classmates in the cognitive domain. Feeling she could not learn like the other women and imagining that others were

criticizing her performance led her to avoid being noticed in class and thus participating. Somehow, Maria compensated for her perceived difficulty to learn by talking with her classmates during class periods.

During the interview, she mentioned that she was afraid to participate because people tend to make fun of others' pronunciation. Nevertheless, when I talked to other women some mentioned that one of the reasons they like coming to Even Start is because, due to the respectful and friendly atmosphere, they feel free to make mistakes. Even though people laughed at others' mistakes, as it tends to happen in any language class, because of her personal history, Maria tends to take this kind of thing personally. At the same time, the way she interprets reality allows her to confirm some of the negative traits of herself that she conceived in the past. Maria's case shows how the concept of self has important consequences and plays a crucial role in the way people interpret life experiences.

According to Maria, the ideal situation for her to be able to learn is by being one on one with someone like Dee or her *comadre's* daughter. Because of her over-concern with other people's opinions, the best way for her to relax, focus, and learn is by being around someone she can trust and feel completely safe with. Considering she has been mistreated and abused by different male figures throughout her life, it seems easier for her to be authentic and experience a sense of personal connection when being around a female figure. However, it seems that feeling surrounded by a group of people—even if they are all female—represents a threat to her psyche. Probably, the more people she sees around her, the greater pressure she experiences as they represent more individuals to seek approval from, and more people to compare herself with.

Even though for most women attending Even Start is vital because of the reasons mentioned, I found both Silvia and Laura to be the exceptions. To Silvia, going to Even Start is not too important considering she takes English classes in other institution as well. In addition, she feels a bit awkward with her classmates because she does not identify with most of them and because the attitude and behavior of the other women often bother her. Laura said that her job, teaching Spanish to kids, the religious group she belongs to, and the role she plays at her church are more important to her than Even Start. In addition, now that she understands a great deal of what people say, she does not feel the urge any more to go to Even Start to learn English. Underlying her opinion is the fact that currently, the things she mentioned represent major sources of self-esteem for her. In addition, Laura is not too interested in interacting with her classmates. The fact that throughout her life she was not encouraged by caregivers to make friends and have an active social life probably explains why attending Even Start is not vital for her.

For the reasons mentioned, both Laura and Silvia were not attending Even Start on a regular basis. When I interviewed them they suggested they were not very motivated to keep on with the program. Part of the reason was that they did not feel they were learning a lot. On the other hand, Maria, who was not too motivated to go to classes because of the academic and psychological issues mentioned before, attended Even Start mainly because going there satisfied her need for having friends. The case of these women

suggests that the tighter the bonds participants maintain with their classmates, the more motivated they feel to continue attending the program.

Even Start compared to other aspects in the women's lives

Considering that each life sphere is connected to other spheres and related to the whole, it is hard to determine which aspect of the women's lives plays a major role on their self-esteem. What is clear is that the benefits they get from attending the program have in turn a positive impact in the other spheres of their lives. Followed by their families, the women said that Even Start is one of the most significant aspects of their existence. Some of the participants mentioned that by learning English and becoming more independent, they contribute to the wellbeing of their families. It is in this sense that many find their participation in Even Start crucial. When asked about the importance of Even Start compared to other areas of her life, Luz replied: "It is very important. My husband, my mother, my daughter are the most important, but if you don't study and don't grow, you can't help them. You don't accomplish anything just by loving them, it is much better to seek for self-improvement; in that way, you help them more."

In each sphere, the women encounter different challenges, satisfy different needs, and find different sources of self-esteem. When asked about their daily routines, all the women mentioned fixing food for family members, cleaning the house, shopping, doing the laundry, and taking care of their children. At Even Start the women are able to satisfy their need to learn, to have time for themselves, and to interrelate with friends. The fact that at Even Start the women have some space for their individual selves contributes to boosting their self-images in a unique way, considering that in the other areas of their lives they are usually required to focus on others' needs.

In spite of the fact that the program contributes to enhancing the women's self-images, they do not necessarily depend on it to continue maintaining contact with their classmates and to keep learning English. In regards to social relationships, the women have built social ties with their classmates through the Even Start experiences. The fact that they see each other outside of class shows their bonds are strong. This is why, independent of the fact that they keep attending the program or not, those relationships will most likely continue taking place. For most participants, the current importance of Even Start at a social level resides on the fact that it facilitates their encounters with the other participants on a daily basis. In addition, as mentioned above, because their children are taken care of, at Even Start it is easier for the women to interact.

In regards to learning English, if for any circumstance the women would have to stop attending the program, this would not necessarily represent a big problem for most of them. Because the majority has spent two years in the program, their level of English already allows them to communicate at least at a basic level. In addition, Dee has encouraged them to incorporate habits and activities into their lives that allow them to keep learning and practicing English on their own. As mentioned above, all of them have become more and more daring in their approaches to Americans, and every time they go shopping, they

have an opportunity to practice their English. Among other activities they do that help them improve their language skills, some watch American shows, some listen to the radio, and some read books. In an effort to make sure others understand her, Olga mentioned she carries a dictionary with her.

Recommendations

As argued, Even Start plays a crucial role in fostering the women's self-esteem and in empowering them to achieve higher goals. Considering there is always room for improvement and based on the interviewees' interests and concerns, the following are suggestions that the program could take into account as ways to enhance its adult participants' self-images.

1. Include more one on one activities

Particularly in the case of people with learning disabilities, low self-esteem, and no or little formal education, it would be ideal for programs like Even Start to include more one-on-one activities for their students. Not feeling the pressure and expectations of an audience (Goffman 1959) would benefit everyone and particularly people who deter their learning process because of their concern with others' opinions. As suggested earlier, Maria does very little progress in class because she constantly worries about what her classmates and teacher might be thinking about her performance. On the other hand, considering that the students who attend Even Start have different English and educational levels, the inclusion of more one-on-one activities would allow each participant to satisfy their educational needs and to learn at their own pace.

2. Improve literacy skills in Spanish

For many reasons, the women feel motivated to complete their education in Spanish, strengthen their knowledge in basic areas such as math, and get a high school diploma. Most women did not complete 12 years of education in Mexico and this has been throughout years a reason to feel inferior to others. In the case of some, their academic level currently interferes with their learning process. The fact that they are not acquainted with terms and ideas in their own language makes it harder for them to understand things in English. Their children often ask them questions or need help with their homework and many times the women do not know the answers and cannot help them. Now that they are learning English, they see themselves as learners and are eager to learn all sorts of things. This is one of the things that the program could do to empower the women and enhance their self-images.

Improving their education would allow them to feel better about them, it would enrich their perspective of life, and it would help them to bridge the cultural and generational gap that tends to separate parents, and particularly migrants, from their children. Aside from improving their self-concepts, by knowing more, the women would also be able to guide their children whenever they have to deal with cultural or academic challenges. By allowing the women to broaden their knowledge and to do it also using their mother tongue, Even Start would contribute to the strengthening of their Hispanic identity as

well as satisfying their need for self-improvement. By improving their communication skills in both languages and by broadening and deepening their knowledge in varied areas, the women could enhance their identity as learners, and thus improve their self-esteem. In my last conversation with Dee Curwen (May 26, 2003) I found out that because many participants have expressed interest in getting a GED in Spanish, arrangements are being made at Even Start to include this as part of Adult Education next year.

3. Include activities designed to release stress

Because of their lifestyle, most women do not devote time to exercise. This implies that they do not count on appropriate outlets to loosen up and revitalize their energy. Except for Amelia, exercising was not a central aspect of their lives in Mexico. The pace of life they had in Mexico, the kinds of obligations they had before, their relationship with family members, and in the case of many, being in constant contact with nature were all aspects that allowed them to have a relatively calm existence. However, the difficulties they face nowadays as poor and undocumented migrants, in addition to the fact that they play different roles at the same time --mothers, wives, and students—, contribute to their high stress level.

When asked “When do you learn better?” basically all the women agreed that when they are relaxed, they learn better. Because the women tend to be tired and stressed, most of them have difficulty to concentrate, and thus, to learn. This is one of the reasons why many chat with their classmates during class. During the focus group, the participants agreed that when Dee makes them sing in class they are able to relax and get energy to keep working. One of the women suggested that when they are able to move around the class [generally the women remain on their sits for about two hours] or that when they sing, people’s mood changes allowing the whole group to interact in a better way. For these reasons I consider the women would benefit tremendously if they could perform activities specifically intended to release stress. Kinesthetic activities, group dynamics, and playing games are some examples of the things that could be included in the English classes’ daily routine. Devoting some time during class to exercise and breathing more consciously would definitely help them relax, allow them to improve their concentration, and thus, to learn with more ease.

4. Improve job skills

Due to the few years of education most women were exposed to and to the fact that they are undocumented, it is very hard for them to find a job and even more so a decent job. Although many would like to study and become professionals, due to their economic situation and the fact that they have small children, most of them cannot afford to do it. Although it would be hard because of their status, what seems more realistic is that they acquire skills so that they can get better jobs and salaries. It would be useful to conduct research to determine what type of skills would be the most appropriate for them to develop. Having in mind what the market requires from Mexican immigrants, Even Start could provide the women with these skills.

Summarizing

Even Start plays a significant role in the self-esteem of its adult participants for two main reasons. At Even Start the women are able to learn English and to establish contact with other Mexicans. Learning English is a priority in their lives as it allows them to communicate with Americans, be more appreciated by family members, play a more active role in life, and ultimately achieve greater levels of autonomy. Another fundamental way in which Even Start provides them with the opportunity to feel good about themselves is through social contact. Because of their lifestyle, in many cases, this is the place where they can be around friends and have more time to socialize. This is crucial for them because it allows them to relax as much as give and find support. At the same time their company and the fact that they go through similar experiences reminds them that they are not alone. In addition, by being around people of their country the women have been able to play some of the roles and display some of the identity traits they had in Mexico. By doing this, the women experience a sense of continuity in their selves, and thus, find stability.

Aside from Even Start there are other contexts such as family and church where the women tend to feel good about themselves. In each of them the women fulfill different needs and encounter different challenges. Given the complexity of human relations and reality, and due to the fact that life circumstances are constantly changing it is hard to determine which sphere plays a major role in making them feel good about themselves. However, what is undeniable is that at Even Start the women find space for self-improvement that they cannot find in other contexts. The different forms of support they find at Even Start and the skills and knowledge that they acquire by attending the program are central in that they allow them to cope with their reality and better incorporate to this country.

CHAPTER VIII CONCLUSIONS

Executive Summary

Migration

The desire to improve their socioeconomic situation brought the informants to this country. Because the majority are of peasant or lower class background and were exposed to few years of education, the opportunities of advancement they had in Mexico were very limited. The fact that many of them received the help of relatives in order to come and establish in this country was also central in their decision to migrate. Besides the fact that they did not speak the language, most of them were separated from family members and familiar life patterns for the first time. Considering that the sense of who they are was a result of a tight interconnection between people, time, space, and culture by coming to this country the women lost those references, and thus, experienced a temporal loss of identity. Even though most of them came with or were hosted by family members, as they struggled to adapt to American culture and as they rebuilt their sense of identity, many went through severe phases of depression, particularly during the first months.

Once in this country the women had to face many challenges. Not speaking English and not having a social security number made it very hard for them to find jobs. Most of them have worked as janitors and unskilled workers in places such as sweat shops, fast food restaurants, farms, hotels, and houses. They got paid the minimum wage and in some cases they had to take the night shift or work during the weekends. Considering their status, some employers as well as some of their American coworkers took advantage of their situation and burdened them with extra work. Although they have had some unpleasant experiences, for the most part working in this country has allowed them to learn new skills, and in general, to become more confident and autonomous.

Migrating to the US has allowed the interviewees to live in better conditions than the ones they had or could have had in Mexico. Their basic needs are satisfied and they are doing things that they would not have been able to do in their country. Both they and their children are studying as well as learning a second language, many have learned how to drive and now have a car, some are building houses in Mexico, some are saving money, and a few are providing materially for other family members. Considering that opportunities for advancement are greater in the US, the majority plan to stay in this country. However, all of them maintain strong bonds with Mexico particularly through the relationship with family members, but also through the media and the Mexicans they interact with in the US. These suggest that a total integration to American society is not possible and is not something they are interested in pursuing (Glick-Schiller et.al. 1995, 52)

As a consequence of migration, the informants have become more independent. Working, solving problems on their own, and in general facing the challenges that come with exposure to another culture has allowed them to attain greater levels of self-confidence and autonomy. Although their Mexican identity is salient and they try to maintain their traditions, they have incorporated some elements of American society.

As a result, their values, ideas, and behavior are gradually changing. They have slightly changed their patterns of consumption, they have included English words in their vocabulary, and they have changed some of their habits. Exposure to greater levels of modernity has led the women to become more internally referential (Giddens 1991). Although most of the informants keep going to church, especially Catholic ideology continues to guide their behavior, many have incorporated some changes as a result of reflective processes. Some have made choices as to when to go to church, others have decided not to attend services, and a few have a different understanding of God.

Self-esteem

Relationships with caregivers, interpretation of life events, and self-reflection have played a major role in building the women's self-esteem. Generally, the women who were often mistreated during childhood tend to have lower self-esteem. It is harder for them to feel accepted and supported by others and they have a harder time acknowledging their competence in those domains that are relevant to their lives. These women tend to expect too much from themselves and thus, to evaluate themselves poorly. Not all the women who were often mistreated by caregivers have lower levels of self-esteem. The way in which the interviewees interpreted life events has been central in determining the impact of aggression on their self-images.

Because of sex and age hierarchies, and the extended use of violence in Mexican society, all the interviewees experienced some level of aggression during their earlier years. The aggressors were typically their parents, older siblings, other relatives, and teachers. Most of them were mistreated verbally, and some physically as well. A few were exploited by being required to do an unequal share of domestic work for those in privileged positions, such as men. Although there were episodes of disrespect and aggression in the lives of the interviewees, in all their perceptions the share of love they received was greater than the share of violence. This is why, for the most part, the women interviewed are cheerful, responsible, active, and reliable adults. They tend to feel hopeful about the future, they avoid feelings of depression and self-contempt (Gecas 1991), and they continuously seek self-improvement. Proof of the latter is that they are learning English.

Although the core of the women's self-esteem was built during childhood, the experiences they have and the knowledge they acquire through sociocultural interaction continue to shape their self-images. The difficulties they have overcome, the accomplishments they have achieved in different domains, and the support they receive from significant others are among their major sources of self-esteem. Again, the way in which they interpret lived experiences determines up to which point these aspects enhance their self-images.

Self-reflection, which according to Giddens (1991) is characteristic of modernity, has been pivotal in modifying their self-concepts. As time has passed and they have adopted different roles, the women have been able to see things from different perspectives. In addition, living in the US has provided

them with the opportunity to distance themselves from caregivers. Being away from them and experiencing different levels of loneliness have led to an examination of past experiences. As a result of reconstructing their self-narratives, many of the women have been able to forgive the aggressors, heal internal wounds, and thus, enhance their self-esteem. In some cases, the fact that migrants tend to idealize the relationships and experiences they had in their native countries, has also contributed to them seeing life from a different angle and has helped them to come to terms with the people that mistreated them.

Identities

Confirming the work of social thinkers (Baldwin 1895, Cooley 1902, Mead 1934, James 1890, Stryker 1980, Rosenberg 1981, Burke 1991, Harter 1999) these interviewees' identities and sense of self reflect their society and in particular their social network. Although the women's selves and identities mirror their society, they have also played an active role in the construction of who they are (Burke 1991). As they interacted with people, they selected traits of the identities they observed others display. In spite of the fact that people's identities are not the result of specific or isolated circumstances but of a combination of all of them, there are certain aspects and events that played a significant role in defining the interviewees' identities.

Considering that structures of intimacy held for long periods often result in the "ossification" of identities (Blumstein, 1991), the relationships that the interviewees had with others, particularly during childhood, played a major role in defining their identities. Conversations with the women revealed that aside from the relationship with caregivers, their identities were strongly influenced by the type of society where they were raised, modern or traditional; hierarchies of sex and age; and social stratification. It is also important to take into account that those events and relationships took place within a cultural context which ultimately determined values, practices, and ideologies.

Based on what the women said as well as on what I perceived, I was able to identify the most salient aspects of Mexican society. These aspects are also the ones that have played a major role in building the identities of the subjects. Social interaction is central in the interviewees' lives but they tend to give priority to family members and close friends. Unity, loyalty, and a sense of reciprocity tend to characterize their relationships. Although Mexican society fosters the nurturance of the "familial self" (Roland 1988), their "individualized self" tends to arise particularly in the presence of people they do not know. At the same time, individualistic behavior is slightly more salient among the women who were raised in the city while collectivistic values are more often found among the women raised in small and tradition-oriented communities.

Social stratification and hierarchies of sex and age are central as they determine the types of activities these women do, their position with regard to others, and the nature of their relationships. These hierarchies are the product of historical processes and are extended throughout Mexican culture regardless of location, type of society, or socioeconomic considerations. Violence, oppression, and discrimination are

among the most negative consequences that these hierarchies generate. Men, adults, and white people with European features and economic resources tend to occupy positions of privilege, while children, women, the poor, and people whose physical traits reveal their indigenous and African background tend to be most affected by the negative aspects of hierarchy. Because of this, most of the informants have been targets of discriminatory and violent practices at some point in their lives.

During childhood and adolescence, their lives were monitored by adults, particularly by men. Although not on a regular basis, as girls, many were treated disrespectfully by older people or required to do more work than others. Lack of communication is one of the subtle ways in which many women were mistreated by caregivers. In many cases, their parents did not ask for their opinions, did not apologize for mistakes, and did not give explanations for their behavior or their decisions.

Because of gender role expectations, the interviewees were taught to do domestic chores from an early age and to assume them as female responsibilities. Due to social beliefs with regard to gendered distribution of labor, their occupational choices and expectations for the future were limited. Proof of that is the fact that few of the informants finished high school, and the majority married at an early age. When they got married, the responsibility of protecting and controlling them was tacitly assigned to their husbands. Two of the interviewees mentioned they had often been mistreated by their partners while four suggested their fathers used to mistreat their mothers. Although the women treat their children respectfully, a few of them tend to be rude with their children, particularly when they are stressed. In this way, age hierarchies and patterns of violence against children are perpetuated.

Because of their father's occupation, their family's socioeconomic background, their ethnic features, and their lack or few years of formal education, many of the women interviewed have been treated and regarded as if they were inferior to others. Because of the tendency to internalize social values, many learned to feel embarrassed and ashamed of those aspects. However, with time and as a result of reflective processes, many have been able to separate themselves from those judgments. Although the informants have felt discriminated against in this country, for the most part they do not take it personally. Instead, they tend to perceive those experiences as directed against undocumented Hispanics in general, and as a product of social, cultural, and economic factors.

The interviewees tend to feel social class distinctions are not so marked in the US for several reasons. Because their experiences with US social structure are limited, the communities they have formed in the US are mainly Mexican. Since they do not have much contact with Americans, they do not feel potential discrimination. In addition, in their eyes, Americans are not as concerned with physical appearance as Mexicans. Another reason is that the women tend to believe that in the US everybody has the same opportunities. This is one of the reasons why many came to this country and why many, having their children's future in mind, do not want to go back to Mexico.

Even Start

The opportunities that the women are given at Even Start have a strong potential for making them feel good about themselves. The two main ways in which the program provides those opportunities is by offering the women English classes and by giving the women the chance to be around people from their country. As the interviewees overcome the linguistic barrier, they are able to function more independently. In the past, their children had to play the role of interpreters. Gradually the women are becoming more and more daring in their linguistic approaches. As they play a more active role in their contact with Americans, they project a different image (more confident, active, and outgoing) before family members and in this sense too, their self-images are enhanced.

Although many women had made friends in church or at work and many have family members living in Oregon, before attending Even Start many felt isolated because they did not have much time and opportunity to interact with friends on a daily basis. At Even Start the women have the opportunity to make close friends, to create community, to experience a sense of belonging, and to find, in the midst of a foreign culture, the world as they knew, felt, and imagined it for a big portion of their lives. In that sense, they are able to re-encounter an essential part of their identities. Because the Even Start program at Lincoln School in Corvallis chooses Mexican participants with low income, the need to learn English, and children under 8; the adult participants who attend the family literacy program have many things in common.

Aside from learning English, at Even Start the women are able to take a break from their daily routines. Because their children are taken care of, they also have time to share experiences and concerns, find and give support, and ultimately relax. At the same time, by being around Mexicans, the women display some of the identity traits they used to display in their own country and this allows them to experience a sense of connection with their culture as well as with spheres of their selves that often remain untouched in their American lifestyle. All the women benefit from being around people from their country and this is more so in the case of those who have made close friends. All the women want to learn English, but the tighter the bonds with their classmates, the greater their motivation is to keep attending the program.

Based on the literature review and particularly on the conversations with the women, I have a few recommendations to make to the Even Start Program. These recommendations have the potential to enhance the women's self-esteem. (1) Incorporate more one-on-one activities to enable students to learn at their own pace and to help participants with special needs to work without feeling a sense of pressure. (2) Provide the women with the opportunity to improve their literacy skills in Spanish and to strengthen their knowledge in basic areas using both languages. (3) Include activities that would allow the participants to release stress and thus to improve their ability to concentrate. (4) Provide the students with skills that will enable them to find jobs or get promoted.

Theoretical Conclusions

The literature on the self revised for this research was useful in that it provided guidelines as to what to look at, what processes take place within the self, what aspects tend to affect the self, how is the self crafted, and so forth. The fact that the literature on the self is so specialized has its advantages. The emphasis that each author places on specific aspects of the self provides researchers with plenty of intellectual tools that allow for meticulous analysis. For instance, one can focus on emotional, cognitive, or behavioral aspects of the self. Or one can study the self utilizing the body of knowledge of different authors and disciplines and thus, assume different perspectives.

The literature on the self, as is the case with all human products, also has its deficiencies. In general, they stem from the fact that, for the most part, scholars have engaged in intellectual exercises to approach the self. As a consequence, the literature often presents a segmented understanding of reality leaving the lay readers with the idea that self-identities are obscure abstractions to be discussed by academics. After reviewing the literature and conducting research on self, self-esteem, and identities, the following were found to be among the main consequences of the excessive emphasis placed on rationality.

Studies on the self typically create artificial boundaries in reality (Stryker 1980, Harter 1999, Burke 1991). For instance, James (1890) speaks of the material self, the social self, and the spiritual self. Throughout this research it was found that these aspects are all integrated and take place simultaneously. Most research focuses on specific issues and assumes only one perspective (Carley 1991, Humphreys and Kashima 2002, Turner and Billings 1991). This often results in microscopic and limited views of self aspects. Piliavin (2002), for example, takes a look at the role that people's habits have in shaping their identities without paying much attention to thoughts and feelings. In this research it becomes apparent that behavior, ideas, and emotions are indivisible.

For the most part, scholars do not include living examples of what they are saying; instead, they use statistics, numbers, and research results (Stryker 1980, Humphreys and Kashima 2002, Turner and Billings 1991). As a result, the literature is often disconnected from reality. Instead of abstractions and complicated analysis, authors could probably say more if they would give examples that would include the researcher's experiences as much as the experiences of their informants. The discussion in this thesis is based in the subjects' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The quotes and examples included in the analysis are meant to speak for themselves. The fact that I interacted with the subjects and established a human connection with them gives this research a more realistic view of the women studied.

Authors typically put stress on the effect that society and culture have on the self (Frieze 2002, Goffman 1959, Blumstein 1991) overlooking important issues. For instance, symbolic interactionists (Mead 1934, Baldwin 1895, Cooley 1902) say the self is a social construction crafted mainly through linguistic exchanges. However, this research revealed that the women's self is a product of everything. Aside from linguistic exchanges, their sense of self was also crafted by aspects such as self-narratives,

social class, and physical environment. Among the main contributions of this study is the realization that migration and Even Start are playing a crucial role in shaping the women's self-identities.

Because each author focuses on something different, theories on the self have multiplied creating disconnection between bodies of knowledge and complicating the understanding of self-identities. Therefore, there is a need to link the knowledge so far acquired within and across disciplines to create a cogent theory that approaches the self in its wholeness and complexity. At the same time, it is necessary to study the self taking into consideration all the dimensions of human existence (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual) and to dare to take the risk of approaching it from all these dimensions as well. In order to make a shift in the study of the self, it would be extremely useful for social scientists to revise their disciplines' and their own conceptions and assumptions about human nature. Only a more holistic understanding of human beings will lead to a deeper and more integrated knowledge about self-identities.

A Researcher's Perspective

The qualitative nature of the research, the literature reviewed, and the perspectives provided by the interviewees allowed me to answer the research questions in an extensive and thorough way. At the same time the conversations with the informants enabled me to share with Even Start's personnel the women's concerns and points of view about the program. In this way, Even Start had access to information that they would not have been able to get. The information gathered was used to modify curricula, to think about strategies to better fulfill each of the students' needs, and to make thorough revisions of policies and other aspects of the program.

The fact that this research has improved life for the women, basically within the class context, made my work meaningful. In addition, this study allowed me to identify and address the day to day issues that take place in the adults' class, and helped me to understand more general aspects about the program. By being at Even Start on a regular basis and by talking with Dee and the women I was able to realize the complexity of the program. I witnessed how much effort the Even Start personnel puts in making things happen in the best possible way. I was also able to realize the difficulties and complexities that the women's reality brings to the class because of their life stories and because of their present situation as illegal immigrants.

If I had more time, aside from interviewing all the women, I would have liked to have visited their homes and talked to their family members in order to see how the women's identities vary as a result of being in a different context, to find differences between their interpretation of events and my observations of their reality, and to know what reactions family members have about them. In this way I would have been able to take a closer look at the ways in which relationship with family members and opinions of significant others shape their self-identities.

I enjoyed enormously working on this research. First, it gave me the opportunity to meet the women as well as their teacher. I enjoyed being around all of them and often felt at home because of their cheerfulness, warmth, and generosity. Secondly, I felt extremely privileged by the fact that the women

shared their autobiographies with me, not only for the pleasure of listening to people's stories, but also because I felt I was fulfilling their need to be heard. Thirdly, listening to the women's stories enriched me because it allowed me to have a better understanding of their culture and of the reality of Latin American women. At the same time what they had to say allowed me to reflect on my own life and on the readings I make of events. Finally, due to the fact that Latin American countries share a common history and cultural legacy, this research allowed me to see how my life and the lives of those who surround me have been affected by cultural aspects.

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