

# *Work, Health, and the Family: Gender Structure and Women's Status in an Undocumented Migrant Population*

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Work and health conditions of an undocumented Mexican migrant population in southern Illinois influence women's status within the family. The conditions threaten the physical and economic survival of the entire family, but pose special challenges to women who are dependent upon men and subordinated within the male/female relationship, even when they assume roles that are indispensable to the family, and that contradict the culturally ideal gender hierarchy. These contradictory roles fail to change the hierarchical ideology. Gender structure is shown to be dichotomous, consisting of behavior and ideology, which are differentially affected by the surrounding conditions. Additionally, men's and women's interpretations of ideology differ, as shaped by their respective experiences within the local context. Gender structure is shown to result from the undocumented family's adaptation to its surrounding conditions.

**Key words:** Mexicans, health, labor, gender structure, undocumented women

THIS PAPER will demonstrate how material conditions surrounding the family can affect its gender structure by influencing men's and women's status. The study is based on a group of Mexican migrant farm workers in southern Illinois, and focuses on women's roles and activities as they define women's status relative to that of men. Regional agricultural characteristics, especially work policies, discriminate against women and compound the disadvantages they face as members of an undocumented migrant population. In this way, local policies maintain women's subordination by forcing their dependence on men. In addition, occupational and economic problems threaten the health of families, and women bear the burden for maintaining family health. In this context, women play key roles as subsidy, subsistence, and health-care providers, through which roles they make crucial contributions to the family. These roles and contributions contradict the idealized cultural norms, yet fail to transform the ideology from a male dominant to an egalitarian system. The paper views this failure to produce ideological change as due to: the conditions that sur-

round the family and that maintain a male dominant ideology; gender structure which is dichotomous, consisting of behavior and ideology, which are differentially affected by and reactive to surrounding conditions; and the cultural definition of gender, which is interpreted according to the different experiences of men and women.

The study examines activities and roles of women in the family, in health care, and at work. It views work and health as primary material conditions affecting survival and adaptation. Work and health conditions reflect the low economic status and social marginality of the undocumented families. To survive these conditions, subsistence and subsidies are critical. I define subsistence as day-to-day wage work that sustains the family between other seasonal work. It differs from other wage work in that subsistence work is associated with crops that individually are less economically important to the region and in which work *per crop* is of shorter term and less remunerative than other seasonal labor. The definition differs from those that present subsistence as represented by non-market activities such as animal raising, and as supplementing wages, usually earned by men (i.e., Martin and Voorhies 1975). Subsidies are resources that supplement work-related income, such as the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) nutritional supplemental program.

The subsistence and subsidy needs of the families studied here reflect both regional differences and differences among migrant populations. The needs are similar to those of Mexican American migrants as described by Briody (1989); however, the survival strategies of women represent the constraints and opportunities they face, and responses they are able to make.

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The people in this study are migrant *and* undocumented, a combination that keeps them almost completely segregated from the larger community so that they face particular difficulty in obtaining subsidy and subsistence resources. Identifying and securing resources is especially challenging to women, who are, in the main, in charge of procuring subsidies for the family. I will therefore analyze how women deal with their social and economic conditions, and how these conditions affect their position within the gender structure.

I define gender structure as the hierarchical or symmetrical arrangement of men's and women's status. The arrangement is malleable (Boserup 1970). For example, Kessler-Harris and Sacks (1987) propose that within the family, economic conditions shape family power relations. They suggest that such conditions pose both constraints and opportunities, and that the family adapts by allocating value or status to roles that respond favorably to constraints and opportunities. In the case under study here, men's status is dependent upon their role as providers. Yet women often assume that role, although their status remains inferior to men's. I argue that this inconsistency is a result of differential effects of conditions on ideology and behavior. The material conditions favor the ideology of men as principal providers yet require the economic behaviors of women.

I confine the analysis of adaptation to the context of material conditions. "Adaptation" is used as "specific behaviors people devise to attain and use resources and to solve the immediate problems confronting them" (Browner and Lewin 1982:63). It is not used in terms of change, such as that caused by migration. "Resources" here refers to institutions, agencies, and personnel that help sustain the migrant families, such as employers, landlords, and the subsidy system. Behaviors are seen as roles, which are "the manifold activities carried out by . . . women, such as child care, housework, subsistence farming, remunerated employment and health care." "Status" is "the value and meaning given to these activities . . . which in turn both reflect and influence the general rubric of gender relations" (Brydon and Chant 1989:1).

### *Background and Significance of the Study*

Research on the influence of material conditions on gender relations among Mexican Americans gives impetus to similar investigations on Mexicans in the United States. Zavella's (1987) study of Chicana<sup>1</sup> cannery workers, for example, showed that women suffer racial and sex discrimination through job segregation. They are assigned positions in seasonal work and of lower rank and wages than men or White, non-Chicano women. The effect is to solidify women's economic dependency on men, thereby reinforcing a traditional ideology of female subordination within the family. Other works also show the malleability of the family of Mexican background in the United States, and the need to understand the dynamics that shape family relations (Andrade 1982, Montiel 1970).

Material conditions influence family roles by presenting or constraining opportunities. A subsidy system such as social services, or publicly supported health care, might exist or be more available in some regions than in others (Briody 1989); differences in availability and patterns of use will have different effects upon family relations because family roles are influ-

enced by the use of such resources. How family roles and relations are influenced depends on the nature of the linkage between family members and social institutions (Zinn 1987). Crucial links are networks and information brokers, roles usually filled by women (Carlos 1981, Melville 1980). Understanding regional characteristics and women's roles and activities is a key to understanding how material conditions influence the family.

Health status is a particularly critical material condition among migrant farm workers. Strigini (1982) and Navarro (1982), for example, have shown that the occupational safety and health status of migrant farm workers continues to be precarious because of their sociopolitical powerlessness and poor economic conditions. Jasso and Mazorra (1984) describe how poor living conditions and a stressful family life result in health problems in the migrant farm working lifestyle. These and other studies note that agricultural work is one of the three most dangerous occupations in the United States. For undocumented Mexican migrants, these conditions are compounded by their sociopolitical status, which reduces their ability to secure occupational safety (Navarro 1982, Strigini 1982) and overcome barriers to health care (Chavez 1986; Chavez, Cornelius, and Jones 1985; Moore 1986).

Recent studies of immigrant women have shown that their experiences differ significantly from those of men and of other women. For example, Curry (1988) notes that among Mexican immigrants, men earn higher wages and have higher occupationally related prestige than do women. Segura's (1989) study of Chicana and Mexican immigrant women at work notes that Mexicanas are less mobile than Chicanas. She also notes that women may *feel* upwardly mobile even when they are not because their perceptions are based on the limited opportunities available to their class. Lamphere (1986) suggests that immigrant working women are integrated into pre-existing labor hierarchies and that experiences of workers differ among ethnic groups. These studies show the combined effect of class, ethnicity, and gender on mobility as well as on women's self-concepts. They suggest the need to understand the effect that immigrant women's work has on their families, on family roles, and on women's self-perceptions, as well as how the effect may or may not lead to ideological change within the family.

In spite of the differences between Mexican and Chicano families, and the problems facing Mexican migrants, little is known about how Mexican families and women adapt. Traditional literature has failed to deal conceptually and methodologically with differences between Mexicans and Mexican Americans (Hayes-Bautista 1980). These differences are important because availability and use of resources differ between Mexican American and undocumented families. The adaptation of undocumented individuals and families is constrained by sociopolitical norms that preclude use of public resources (Chavez 1985). There is a similar lack of research on the adaptation process of undocumented Mexicans, and on the undocumented family (Chavez 1985, 1986). The study of the migrant woman in the context of the undocumented family, which also has been neglected, is the basis for this paper.

### *Methods*

I conducted research between November 1983 and November 1985, a period that included two harvest seasons and

two off-seasons, when in- and out-migration increases and decreases respectively along with family size. The first six months of the research were used as a pilot study to define the population and contact relevant offices and personnel, build rapport with the families, and identify locally relevant issues. I identified and selected the families through the snow-ball method (Chavez, Cornelius, and Jones 1985), making use of an existing network. Being a bilingual Mexican woman and mother facilitated my learning about women's attitudes and roles. I was privileged to become godmother to a migrant child, a role that reinforced my ability to learn, in particular about the importance women give to their roles in securing their families' welfare. Illustrating this point is their reaction to my work picking and packing fruit. Although I made several attempts to explain my research purposes, several of the women interpreted my motives as the need to work to support my own family. They were, therefore, very careful about teaching me fruit picking and packing skills. Others, who seemed to understand my purpose, were less helpful and more reserved. I learned about the families from a woman who later became a key informant. I had spent two homesick months in the area without seeing another Mexican or Mexican American. While shopping, I overheard her unmistakable Mexican Spanish and approached her anxiously as she distrustfully looked me over. Thus came my first lesson about my informants: the importance of their undocumented status, and the protective, secretive attitude of women about disclosing information about their families. I learned that the use of survey tools such as questionnaires would jeopardize the project because several adults were illiterate. Even those who could read were highly suspicious of written materials and uncooperative when notes were taken. Approaching the population was done with all these factors in mind.

I conducted the study through informal ethnographic interviews and participant observation, primarily in women's activities. My activities included picking blueberries, packing apples and pears, volunteer work in the migrant children's day-care center, shopping with the migrant women (and often their husbands and children as well), and accompanying them on various business matters, usually serving as a translator. I attended meetings and other functions, mainly within a labor camp that was the hub of migrant activity, or any place where migrants gathered such as church or parties. I also served as their elected regional representative to the Illinois Migrant Council (IMC). After an initial period of a few weeks, during which I am sure I was carefully observed, women shared information with me, such as where daily work could be found. They also gave me rides to the fields, and initiated me into the art of productive blueberry picking. During our work, visits to their homes, our informal women's group gatherings at the end of the work day, shopping or conducting other business, sharing of childcare activities and more, I conducted open-ended interviews and gathered data as guided by the women themselves. It was this sharing of women's work and other experiences that led to the present analysis.

### *The Study Group*

The subjects of this study were 11 Tarascan women<sup>2</sup> between the ages of about 20 to 55 and their families, all from Cheran, Michoacan, Mexico. These families made up an esti-

mated one-third of the area's migrant farmworking population. Households were composed of nuclear families and other relatives linked in an extended family system. Except for one elderly couple, all the families had children under the age of 17 years. Other relatives included grandmothers, nephews, godsons, cousins, and other consanguinal, affinal, and fictive kin (i.e., *compadres*, a relationship established through godparenthood). The first of these families initiated labor migration to Jackson and Union Counties approximately 17 years ago.<sup>3</sup> Families have been in the area between five and 15 years, but are considered by the host community, and view themselves, as "migrants." The label is reinforced by continuous in- and out-migration of household members (such as when men temporarily leave to follow work) and by their continued work in agriculture. Although all the households in the study consisted of "conjugal units and any of their children" (Vega 1990:1017), a variety of household types remain in the region. Housing patterns change seasonally, as when people move into a migrant camp, or as other housing is available. Generally, the families have traveled the same migration route and speak Spanish. They are predominantly undocumented. All the households had family members who were not legal residents. Some couples initially claimed to have green cards but later confided to me either that they were undocumented or were using false documents, particularly for their children. In all the households both parents were undocumented, and I knew with certainty of only five children in the group who were born in the United States. This relative homogeneity posed the rare research opportunity to study cultural adaptation without the usual methodological problems found in research among Mexicans in the United States (Hayes-Bautista 1980).

Size and composition of the households changed frequently through in- and out-migration; however, the average household size was between five and six members. No families were headed by women nor did any include single migrant women. The only exceptions were families with young unmarried daughters or grandmothers, one or whom lived with her daughter's family and the other whose husband divorced her but cohabitated with her on occasion.

### *The Setting and Background*

Most of southern Illinois consists of family-owned agricultural farms and its economy is agriculturally based. In Union County alone, nearly 140,000 acres are farmland, of which 70% is in crops. Locally grown agricultural product sales contribute tens of millions of dollars to Union and Jackson Counties. Out of this total, 70 to 80% is from crops (US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1988). Peaches and apples are principal products in the local economy because they are produced mainly for the national market. Other produce is sold locally including blueberries, strawberries, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, cabbages, pears, and squash.

Economic development led to farming and population changes in southern Illinois. During the 20th century, most southern Illinois family farms became commodity producers. Mechanization increased in response to the pressures of industrialization. The success of the farms rested on decreasing labor costs. These pressures caused a drastic decrease in the hiring of local farm hands, as well as fluctuations in the local

population size. Population size stabilized around 1970 (Adams 1988).

Adams' report supports my conclusion that Mexican immigration resulted from the pressures of economic development in southern Illinois. Harvesting in particular remains unmechanized, and requires seasonal labor. Mexican seasonal labor was, and continues to be, imported through recruitment as in other parts of the midwest (Haney 1979). Arriving Mexican migrants assumed agricultural work and were integrated into the local economy. They were also integrated into the socioeconomic system, and fixed into its lowest social stratum. The major mechanism maintaining Mexican migrants in this socioeconomic position has been work policies and the relations they fostered, such as a social distance from the host community, physical and language barriers to integration, poor living conditions, and precarious health.

The labor camp in which most of the Mexican families live is physically isolated from the host community. It is about ten miles from Cobden, the closest town, and is surrounded by agricultural fields. Three other larger towns encircle the camp: Ana, Murphysboro, and Carbondale, each about 20 miles away. Most stores, the Department of Motor Vehicles, health care facilities, and the church are located in the three larger towns. The IMC is especially important because it provides critical migrant services such as emergency food relief; unfortunately, it is located in Carbondale. The camp is important because it offers most of the migrant housing and other services. It includes 36 housing units, a primary care clinic, a job service office, and a day-care center. It also houses the only telephone available to migrant families, whose poorly equipped homes lack telephone lines.

Sociocultural differences and language barriers between migrant and host groups are reinforced within this setting. Carbondale is a university community, and its student population adds cultural diversity to the town itself, but the study families live predominantly either in the camp or surrounding fields. Undocumented status, limited English, low educational levels, and high competition for jobs by local workers mean that migrants have almost no work opportunities outside of agriculture. For both local as well as migrant women, career opportunities are even fewer than for men because of the local traditional ideology that views men as principal workers and women as helpers or dependents. The economic depression maintains the ideology because of the scarcity of jobs, particularly jobs that offer prestige and upward mobility.

Language barriers inhibit the interaction of Mexican migrants in community services and institutions. Service facilities such as hospitals and government offices have no bilingual staff; migrants cannot make effective use of them, and are uncomfortable when they do go to them. Most families have at least one member, usually a school-age child, who speaks some English. But proficiency is insufficient to communicate clearly. I frequently witnessed English-speaking bureaucrats yelling at Mexican clients as if volume overcame the language barrier.

Mexican farm worker families are viewed by the local community as outsiders, yet are recognized as an important labor commodity. Local reaction to a series of Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) raids illustrated this ambivalence. While working with Mexican women in the fruit warehouse one morning, a supervisor quietly told me to warn them about

the presence of INS vehicles in his fields. The women quickly gathered in my car and we sped away as Anglo women coworkers looked on, whispering and looking amused. The raids lasted two weeks, and a few apprehensions and deportations were made. Mexicans suspected that some locals reported them to INS. Local children taunted their migrant peers during school by mimicking INS officers, followed by bursts of laughter. The media emphasized the raids' effects on local growers and made reference to Mexican workers as "illegal aliens." At the same time, during the raids, a visible camaraderie emerged between farmers and undocumented families. Employers aided their undocumented workers and families by providing them shelter and food. When questioned by the INS, the employers denied knowledge of workers' whereabouts. They brought news of relatives in hiding to families, and conversations included humorous accounts of how people evaded INS officials.

### *Work Conditions*

Work conditions of the Mexican migrant families, particularly as they affect women, can best be understood by using Lamphere's (1986:119) model of analysis. According to this model, "economic niches" (specific regional economies) through their specific needs determine the experiences of immigrant workers. For example, wages paid to men determine whether others in the family need to enter wage work to provide subsistence. Immigrant workers are integrated into a pre-existing hierarchical production system. In this system, production, the means of production, and the hierarchy of production, are reproduced:

The means of production must be reproduced or replaced. . . . More importantly, the social relations of production, the divisions between owners, managers, and workers, need to be reproduced through the continuous replacement of individuals in these categories and through the socialization of workers and managers to their jobs, including an acceptance of the system as legitimate.

Lamphere's model is conceptually appropriate to the present case because Mexican workers replaced the previous labor supply in southern Illinois. Their recruitment represents the reproduction of the means of production, because Mexicans compose almost 100% of the agricultural labor. The social relations of production continue to be reproduced in the tasks and positions of Mexican workers, and those between men and women. The divisions among workers, and between workers and administrators reflect a pre-existing system of work relations. Mechanisms are operative that maintain and socialize workers into the hierarchy. And wage differentials between men and women result in the need for women's subsistence work, as I show later in my discussion of the family.

In addition, the work available to women relative to men is rooted in the local economic niche and in the traditional roles that women have held within it. As Adams (1988) reports, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, local farm women's tasks were separate from those of men. Women grew flowers and raised poultry, activities that represent subsistence farming according to traditional anthropological views (i.e., Martin and Voorhies 1975). Women worked in the fields when extra help was needed. Their role was that of field hand, a role that

suggests that their contributions were viewed as extensions of their domestic chores and as supplemental. The ideology that separates men and women at work and accords differential status is reproduced by local agricultural employers with regard to Mexican migrant farm working women. The agricultural tasks, roles, and statuses they are assigned constitutes the reproduction of the subordination of women and their labor within the structure of labor relations.

A division of labor is the mechanism through which production and labor relations are reproduced. Undocumented workers are placed below other migrant and local workers, and undocumented women are at the lowest echelons. With few exceptions, Mexican men do the orchard harvesting and all field maintenance. Mexican men obtain no higher ranking positions than field foremen. Administrative positions are filled either by farm owners or by the few locals who agree to work only if placed in these positions. In this hierarchy of production, farm owners and white locals are at the top as managers, followed by documented and other migrant or seasonal workers who may rise to foremen, followed by Mexican undocumented men as harvesters and maintenance workers, and finally Mexican women as described below.

Mexican women have no access to non-agricultural work that offers prestige, higher wages, improved working conditions, or other means of upward mobility. In agricultural work, women are for the most part not allowed in the (peach and apple) orchards. They are used to harvest the other crops and to pack peaches and apples in the warehouses. Packing fruit is viewed as "women's work." Yet even within this work category, subdivisions exist that rank Mexican women lower than other women. Warehouse jobs can be divided into those at which workers sit or stand, box or bag, and sort or wash. Standing, boxing, and washing are physically the hardest, are filled only by Mexican women, and are jobs from which workers are not recruited to supervisory positions. Mexican women also represent labor reserves. When rain or other inclement weather conditions temporarily stop production, compensatory harvesting is necessary to prevent spoilage. Employers ask for or allow women when these conditions threaten crops, or when crops are abundant. Even then, women are considered "helpers," and may only work as part of a male-headed work party.

To socialize workers into the labor hierarchy, employers promote rationales. In informal interviews, several women explained: "El trabajo es muy pesado. Uno tiene que cargar la escalera y correr con ella." ("Orchard work is too demanding. One must even run while carrying the ladder.") "Dicen los patrones que hay muchos hombres y es peligroso para mujeres. Ya han pasado cosas. Ahora no quieren problemas y mejor no dejan a las mujeres trabajar." ("The growers say that there are many men and this is dangerous to women. Incidents have happened so they won't let women work there.")

The rationales serve several functions. They articulate the ideology in which women's exclusion from the highest paid harvest work is justified because it sees men as principal workers, women's wage work as extensions of their familial roles, and women's familial roles as inferior to men's. Rationales help deny the fact that male labor is most profitable to farmers because men respond to aggressive production-enhancing techniques. Competition and physical fights, for example, are common among orchard workers. Rationales also help justify the relegation of women to other crops, and their use as

labor reserves. In sum, the rationales provide a legitimization of the gender and class hierarchy, and of Mexican women's place within it. However, rationales fail to explain contradictions in behavior and policies. Three important questions remain unanswered: why are the bases for the rationales ignored when women's labor is needed? why do women themselves quickly respond by working in the orchards when they are called? and why are women not denied other, equally demanding and potentially dangerous work?

Contradictions in rationales and behavior represent interpretations of ideology as shaped by work conditions. Women use the rationales as culturally appropriate explanations for the discrimination they face. The rationales help mask their true position in the work structure by emphasizing women's safety and modesty, cultural values assigned to the female role. At the same time, rationales emphasize men's roles as principal providers. For example, when women work in the orchards, they refer to their work as "ayudandole a El" ("helping him"—the husband). Yet, women do not refer to their other agricultural work as "helping," but rather as "work." They also do not hesitate to work in the orchards whenever they can. Women use rationales and yet work in other crops and as labor reserves because they consciously recognize that the ideology that subordinates them is maintained by local constraints and opportunities. Also, low wages paid to men, although higher than those paid to women, require women's subsistence work for family survival. Lack of other opportunities leads women to perceive orchard work as a means to economic improvement. This attitude parallels what Segura (1989:50) calls "subjective mobility—the feeling of occupational betterment" in a system that actually denies this mobility. The significance of work conditions in shaping women's interpretations of ideology is that women perceive the relationship between ideology and reality. Ideologically, women are dependent upon men, whose work is supposed to provide for all the household. The reality is that local work characteristics prevent men from fulfilling this role, require women to work to sustain the family, all while denying women the avenues to overcome their dependent position.

The division of labor and its rationales also are used to justify differential wages. Men's orchard work is the highest paid harvest work. On a five-day, 40-hour work week, men average \$200 harvesting apples. Because wages are based on individual production, this amount varies seasonally and between workers. Of the crops women work, the highest paid is blueberries, at \$3.50 per crate (which takes about one hour to fill). In general, men's orchard earnings exceed what women earn in other crops.

Work policies further prevent the emancipation of women by enforcing discriminatory housing policies. The labor camp requires that heads of households prove their "migrant farm worker" status in order to qualify as tenants. This requirement is met by being employed or demonstrating a desire to work in agriculture, without other employment. Although women meet this criterion, camp policies deny housing to single women or female-headed households. The value of women's work thus is not acknowledged by the local farmers who established the labor camp. Some employers provide on-farm housing, usually in trailers or older houses, for male workers and their families in exchange for work. Families who enter into these arrangements have the advantage of securing housing throughout the year. Camp residence only is available during

the harvest months, usually late May to October. Several of the study families have at some time located year-long housing in exchange for the work of the adult males in the household. None of these arrangements are ever offered to women, who also work for the landlord. One case illustrates this point. A husband divorced his wife despite her objections. She was then evicted from the trailer home that their employer had provided in exchange for their work. The Mexican families, especially women, recognized the irony of the situation and supported her claim: "Yo siempre he trabajado mas que el. Ahora que el se va el patron me quiere echar de aqui." ("I've always worked more than my husband. Now that he's going, the landlord still wants to throw me out.") As this case shows, women and their work lack the status that men and men's work are accorded. An important effect is that women are dependent on men for housing and family income.

### *Health Conditions*

Health conditions do not specifically maintain women's subordination, but they do have adverse effects on the family. Since women have the primary responsibility for family health, health conditions represent both an obstacle to emancipation for women, as well as the context for contradicting the gender hierarchy. In this section, I will describe how conditions affect health and pose specific problems to women.

The health of the migrant families is precarious. Problems typically reflect their poverty, occupation, and the minority status that keeps them isolated from the host community (Chavez, Cornelius, and Jones 1985; Moore 1986; Moustafa and Weis 1968; Navarro 1982; Strigini 1982; Weaver 1976; WHO 1974). The most common problems were skin reactions to pesticides, gastrointestinal and respiratory conditions (principally bronchitis), and ear, nose and throat infections, especially among children. Of the 14 families studied, seven included children who required regular medical care. Conditions ranged from vision impairment to severe renal problems. Both children in a single family were expected to need renal transplants by age five. Their 24 year-old mother had a history of medical problems in her family, which she could not clearly define: "Mi papa tenia problemas y creo que de eso murio. Los doctores aqui me dijeron que todos mis hijos iban a salir enfermos. Mejor me opere." ("My father had problems and I think he died of that. Doctors here told me all my children would be ill. I chose to have the operation.") She had a tubal ligation at 21.

Lack of employee health benefits and occupational safety threaten workers and families with frequent and severe injuries, most often to men who are the only ones who use farming equipment. However, farming practices include transporting workers, including women and adolescents, in the backs of open trucks. Two notable accidents occurred within about six months. One included five men who fell out of a moving pick-up truck, resulting in at least one severe head injury. In the other case, a man's leg was permanently damaged by a tractor. In both cases, the families suffered great financial distress as recoveries required over one year. Illness and disabling injuries pose severe hardships because these families also lack health insurance. Fear of losing their jobs or of getting deported keeps them from asking for safety at the work-

place, or other needed employee benefits. As Moore (1986) shows, undocumented workers have a real or imagined political inability to gain occupationally related security. Mexican migrants would not, for example, even seek the assistance of a local branch of the Department of Labor, which was housed within the camp.

Family separation adds mental and physical stress. When injuries, illness, or disability related to work occur, the family attempts to compensate by increasing its income through work. Since work is limited locally, this decision often requires the temporary out-migration of at least some family members, usually men. Because women remain with children, they bear a major burden for maintaining family security and welfare. They must deal with bureaucratic agencies associated with health care services and insensitive and prejudiced personnel, and must find the means to overcome transportation, cost, and language barriers.

Socioeconomic status and the division of gender roles affect transportation safety. Accidents are common, in part because migrants are financially unable to purchase reliable vehicles or to properly maintain them (Jasso and Mazorra 1984). Problems also result from the high rate of alcoholism among men, who are usually the owners and operators of automobiles. Cultural norms militate against women abusing alcohol, but since most of them do not drive, they cannot serve as "designated drivers."

Infectious diseases recur because of inaccessible and fragmented migrant health care. Several years ago, a contaminated reservoir led to an outbreak of shigella in Union County. Mobility interrupts treatment because treatment programs differ along the migration route. Infected migrants who leave and cannot receive treatment elsewhere contaminate others upon return. The problem re-surfaces in the migrant population each season. Treatment of infants and children with shigella and other gastrointestinal problems at the migrant day-care center is a major concern every year. Children contaminated with other infections, such as ringworm, are not accepted at the day-care center to prevent the spread of infection. Mothers of infected children face the need to find other means of child care, especially when work is most available, most needed, and help with child care is hardest to find.

Inadequate housing contributes to poor health. During the winter months, most families live in trailers or old houses that lack heating sufficient to cope with sub-zero winter temperatures. In summer, the poor conditions of most housing allows the introduction of disease-carrying pests such as flies, ticks, and vermin. Some homes lack good refrigerators, and others have none at all, so food is left out where it is exposed to insects and rodents. Typical high summer temperatures and humidity also contribute to bacterial growth and food spoilage. Also, limited storage facilities prohibit purchasing in economical large volume. Nutritional patterns reflect practical limitations. Family dinners often are composed of corn flakes and milk, or flour tortillas, which are a staple food. Responsibility for dealing with nutritional limitations and related consequences falls on women, who prepare the family meals.

The seasonality of the migrant life adds stress. Family size increases during the summer as households are crowded with incoming workers. The result is reduced privacy and fewer quiet hours for rest and sleep. Although rare in southern Illinois, INS raids occur during harvest seasons. When raids

occur, the infants and toddlers at the day-care center cry and require far more attention from the staff in order to be soothed enough to fall asleep. Seasonal effects on agricultural economy, as when crops fail and work is scarce, threaten family welfare. A psychological response among men is increased alcohol consumption and violent behavior, specifically wife-beating. Both pose physical and mental health risks to women and to their children, who witness such acts.

Inaccessible health care facilities and inadequate staffing inhibit effective health care use. Southern Illinois offers only one publicly supported mental health care facility. Jackson County also offers one mental health center in Carbondale. The center has set fees, only operates during regular business hours, and has the typical problems of language and cultural differences. According to several respondents, however, medical care is more accessible in southern Illinois than in other regions along the migration route. One woman gave the example: "Allá en Florida, nomas habia una clinica y estaba muy lejos. Luego nos hacian esperar todo el dia, haciendo cola." ("In Florida [where we were] there was only one clinic and it was very far. Then they would make us wait, standing in line all day.")

The migrant clinic reflects the scarcity of resources available to Mexican migrants, especially women. Its services are limited to primary care, and physician visits are offered only two evenings per week. The clinic staff and clientele are highly incompatible. The staff is composed of foreign students to whom the undocumented Mexican migrant experience is unfamiliar. They are hired because they speak Spanish, but there are clear socioeconomic and cultural differences between them and the patients. The staff mistreats Mexican migrants. Some families have complained about the staff calling women "dirty, ignorant, and uncooperative," as detailed elsewhere (Chavira 1987). Mexican patients view the staff as uncaring, self-serving, and deceitful. As one woman put it, "a ellos nomas les importa el dinero, no la gente!" ("they only care about the money, not the people [they serve].") These negative perceptions and interactions are not resolved because the staff leaves once they complete their education. Administrators supervise the clinic in absentia, and Mexican migrants have neither the channels, nor the social or political clout through which to voice grievances or affect changes. Instead, Mexican migrants use the clinic when problems arise that are impediments to the conduct of daily activities, primarily work. Women attend frequently, bringing their children or other family members. Attending the clinic and dealing with associated problems thus is a concern mainly for women. As a consequence of their clinic experiences, women distrust the opinions and treatment of the medical staff. Compliance is poor, increasing the potential for ineffective treatment of both women and the entire family as well.

### *The Family*

Head-of-the-household status usually is presented in the literature through decision-making within the family (i.e., Cromwell and Ruiz 1979, Hawkes and Taylor 1975, Ybarra 1982, Zinn 1980). Women's participation in decision-making is a typical gauge of egalitarianism. Zinn's study suggests that decision-making as an indicator of gender relations depends on the degree to which decisions are acknowledged, and whether the decision-maker enforces his or her choice. Looking at the

sharing of housework among eight families and at who decides that it should be shared, Zinn (1980:53) says:

Clearly, it was the wives . . . who made and enforced the decision that their husbands should help with housework. . . . The fact that husbands did housework, despite their objections, is seen as an indication of their wives' power in the marital relationship.

In my present study group, decision-making is largely the women's responsibility. They make decisions about work, migration, housing, health care and health needs, child care, schooling of children, and family size and composition (i.e., sharing the home with relatives). Adherence to women's decision-making represents the family's pragmatic responses to adverse conditions, such as the need for health care, but not the heightened status of women, as I had suggested elsewhere (Chavira 1987, 1988). Women's decisions are generally uncontested, but when they are, men's decisions override women's. If women feel strongly, however, they use logic to convince others. They may, for example, point out how local services better suit the family's health needs, when migration is the issue and illness is a problem.

Yet women's decision-making represents neither household headship nor dominant status, because women's decisions are subordinate to men's. Women's decision-making involves convincing, which is not the same as enforcing their choice, as men can do and as is the case in Zinn's example. Men's ability to enforce their decision results from the ideology in which they are viewed as principal providers and thus as household heads. Yet role expectations differ from actual behavior, demonstrating two of my key points: that the genders interpret ideology differently, and that their interpretations reflect their experiences as shaped by surrounding conditions.

**IDEOLOGY, GENDER PERCEPTIONS, AND ROLES.** One issue in the differential interpretation of ideology is violence against wives. The standards of the culture lead people to think that physical abuse of women is a negative behavior. Newlyweds are often told that the groom should not hit his wife. Such advice affirms the negative view of wife-beating in this culture, but also recognizes its frequent occurrence within the marital relationship and the fact that it represents men's interpretation of their dominant status. Men hit their wives frequently, and usually within the privacy of the home. The fact that men hit and that they do so usually only at home, indicates that they regard it as an act of social deviance, but also as a prerogative of dominant status. The confines of the home help shield men from the social ideology which condemns their abusive behavior. When an incident becomes known, others show their disapproval. The behavior of women demonstrates that they do not view physical force as legitimate. Women shun the perpetrator and, the older women in particular, speak out against his abuse to him and to others. Mothers of women who have been abused by their husbands will call the police, hide their daughters, pursue legal actions so as to have their abusive sons-in-law incarcerated, and gather social support by informing others about his behavior. As a female researcher, I was not privy to conversations among men, and therefore am unaware of men's verbal reactions to perpetrators; however, men show disapproval by supporting women's condemnation of abusive men. For example, while one man and his wife lived with another family, he beat her severely. The host, following his own wife's



wishes, warned the abusive husband that the couple would have to leave if the abuse did not stop. The warning was effective in deterring violence because the couple had nowhere else to go. The host's wife said: "Que no le pegara tan feo y en nuestra casa!, porque que iban a decir? Que nosotros no hicimos nada! Y si le pasaba algo, a nosotros nos iban a echar la culpa!" ("He shouldn't hit her so badly, and in our home! What would others say? What if something should happen to her? They would blame us [for doing nothing to protect her].") As this statement demonstrates, women help and protect each other. They do so by calling attention to the ideology which condemns woman abuse and to the socially recognized responsibility of men to uphold that ideal. The fact that women have developed such strategies demonstrates that wife battering is a component of gender relations as they exist within this setting.

As I have shown elsewhere (Chavira 1988), women perceive their roles as strong and brave for the sake of their children. The perception influences women often not to reveal incidents of abuse. On the one hand, a woman who is abused may be the subject of pity and thus of humiliation. On the other, social disapproval of her husband may exacerbate the problem by infusing him with anger, which he may turn against her and her children. One woman told a small group of us women: "Este me estaba pegando cuando estabamos en la cama y yo nomas me hacia asi, y me ponia la almohada en la cara para que las muchachas no me oyeran." ("He was hitting me when we were in bed and I would just duck and hold the pillow to my face so the girls [her daughters] wouldn't hear me.") Women stay with abusive husbands not because they simply accept battering as inherent in gender relations, but because they have no other choice. Undocumented Mexican women cannot survive in southern Illinois without the sponsorship of a male worker. Women's self-perceptions as crucial to their children's survival and the paramount importance of the maternal role in a woman's life are reinforced constantly by the perilous conditions surrounding the family.

Women's perceptions about their roles and the conditions that help shape them form the basis for their ability to develop adaptive strategies for the family, especially those that enable a man to pursue opportunities to fulfill the provider role and to provide the family with its basic necessities. After a severe wife-beating incident, the woman's family and the camp personnel aided her in having her husband jailed. The man was unreliable in his familial obligations. The incident occurred just after the birth of their fourth child. Wanting to protect the woman and her family from further violence, bureaucrats advised her of her option to have him committed to the community's mental health facility for up to six months. She agreed to six weeks, which disconcerted them. They did not understand that without his work, she could not secure housing or employment, meaning she and her family could not survive. She lacked the financial means to leave. Leaving also would mean breaking with her only social support system—her parents, siblings, and other extended family. Her reasons were related to her own and her family's welfare. She had him released at the beginning of the apple harvest, with the condition that he work to support his family and secure housing, which he did.

Differential interpretations of gender ideology appear in the sexual relationship. Both men and women view promiscuity in either gender as improper behavior; however, a man whose illicit relations (with local women) become known is the subject

of criticism by other men if his wife is their sister or daughter, or if he fails to meet his financial responsibilities to his wife and family. While this criticism may not end extra-marital relationships, it tends to limit separation and divorce. The oldest couple, for example, continues to co-habitate, part-time, even after divorce. This arrangement was not socially scorned; however, the man was criticized by both men and women for leaving her when doing so meant her economic devastation and eviction. Criticism eased when he resumed the provider role, such as contributing groceries and assisting in her relocation.

On the other hand, both men and women emphasize monogamy for women, especially during the reproductive years. Gender hierarchy is related to the life cycle. Couples tend to have children soon after marriage and wife abuse begins or increases shortly thereafter. The birth of his children (boys and girls equally) signify to a man official confirmation of his dominant status. One expression of this belief is that women in their reproductive years are jealously guarded by their husbands. Women demonstrate conformity to their cultural and gender role expectations by not going out at night without their husbands and/or children, holding conversations with men only when necessary or when husbands are present, and not participating in activities that attract attention to body movements. For example, only men make use of a volleyball court at the labor camp. Women dress conservatively, with long skirts or pants that conceal body contours and limbs. They wear their hair tied in single braids. Young girls differ only in that they wear their hair long and loose. These customs differ from Anglo customs currently in vogue and reveal to others women's adherence to their cultural roles and identities. As women age, such restrictions and women's submission to male dominance decrease. For instance, a group of older women in their late 30s and early 40s (early marriage usually results in early grandparenthood, which overrides age as a marker of a woman's mature status) asked me to take them out on the town one evening (an unprecedented event). When a husband asked his wife what time she would return, she brusquely answered "Pos yo creo que hasta mañana, ya ves que horas son ya!" ("Well, perhaps not until tomorrow, for it is late already, as you can see!") The husband accepted this explanation without further comment. A young wife could not answer her husband in this manner, much less enjoy an evening out, without social and physical repercussions. It should be noted, however, that the event did raise some surprise but that criticism was curtailed by the fact that our evening group was exclusively composed of women.

Three critical roles of women contradict the ideology of men as principal providers: those of subsistence providers, subsidy providers, and health guardians. The contributions that women make through these roles help sustain the family and represent its adaptation to the surrounding conditions. Yet the roles and contributions fail to change ideology and heighten women's status to the degree that family members view women's position as equal to men's.

**WOMEN AS SUBSISTENCE PROVIDERS.** I stated earlier that wage differentials between men and women necessitate women's subsistence work because while the family depends heavily upon the income from men's work, men's earnings are insufficient to sustain the family, especially through difficult periods. Men's work and wages are constrained by agricultural cycles, and hindered by ideology. For example, peach harvests



are from late May to June. The apple harvest usually includes only September and part of October. When a severe winter killed the peach crop in 1984, work became scarce. Women usually harvest strawberries during the peach season and that year strawberry yields were also very low. While women went to work in the strawberry fields, men would wait for "heavy" or "men's," higher-paying work, which did not become available. In one case, a woman returned from work having earned only \$5, the family's total income that day. This example is not isolated. When we consider the respective seasons, and the number of "men's" crops compared to "women's" crops, it becomes clear that women's subsistence activities are longer in duration and occur more frequently than men's regular work.

Briody's (1989) and Lamphere's (1986) studies demonstrate that the type of subsistence strategies developed through women's wage work, depends on two critical factors: the stage of the family's cycle, such as whether children are present, and, the workplace conditions surrounding women's work, including policies and the kind of work that women do and that is available to them. In my study, it is important to note that all but the oldest of the families had children. Children motivate women to work for wages, but they also help mothers develop work-related strategies. Strategies of women include use of their children's labor to augment family earnings when most needed. Women, however, were protective of young children, entrusting them to a care-giver, day-care center or school. The settings in which mothers interact, such as day-care centers, are used to learn about work possibilities. In this way, women can pursue the subsistence strategy of working on various crops, even in one single day.

The hilly terrain of southern Illinois provides a diverse agricultural base (Adams 1988) which is the material basis for women's subsistence roles and strategies. During the six-month harvest season, women work in harvests that overlap. Climatic conditions affect crops differently. The failure of one crop does not necessarily cut the thread of employment for the season. The apple harvest, however, lasts only six weeks in a good year. Therefore, women's work is not dependent on any one crop. In this way, agricultural diversity provides the day-to-day wage work that women conduct to support their families.

As Zavella (1987) points out, seasonal work and year-long work differ in their effects on women within the family. Women's subsistence roles are bound to the harvest season. Once it ends, women become almost totally dependent upon men, because only men can gain agricultural employment during the winter months, and because non-agricultural work is not available to Mexicans. Winter farm work involves only field maintenance, such as tree pruning, and farm machinery (i.e., vehicle) operations. Employers do not hire women for this type of work. As I have already shown, work outside agriculture is almost totally unavailable to women because of their undocumented status and associated problems.

The impact of women's subsistence roles on the family reveals a dichotomous family adaptation. As Briody (1989:195-196) says about her Texas sample,

While it is becoming more acceptable for women to make money outside the home, particularly in situations where a household is unable to support itself on the earnings of the principal worker, employment continues to be defined primarily as the male's domain.

Similarly, the families in this study view women's wage con-

tributions and activities as supplemental to men's, even when the family relies solely on women's work. For example, the costs of a man's temporary out-migration for work is weighed against waiting for local work only if the wife can find subsistence work. Nevertheless, her work and wages are viewed as links between men's work.

Zavella's (1987) study shows that marital conflict can emerge within a family with a traditional ideology when women participate in the labor force. In my study group, when women work, marital relations improve and the distribution of domestic tasks shows accommodation and compromise. For instance, whereas child care and domestic chores are traditionally women's responsibilities, men assume some of these duties when women work and men do not. Men care for young children, and go grocery shopping and do laundry, although they usually will not cook or clean. Domestic problems are not resolved by the woman leaving wage work. Marital strain is eased by the work and income earned by both husband and wife. Incidents of known domestic violence are fewer, and couples demonstrate increased congeniality when work availability and participation increase.

**WOMEN AS SUBSIDY PROVIDERS.** The social marginality and isolation of the families literally distance migrant families from resources in the community. Lack of employment opportunities outside agriculture, lack of English proficiency, lower educational levels, undocumented status and lack of recognition of Mexicans as community members, translate into their reduced participation in the host community. Reduced participation diminishes subsidy procurement because families are disconnected from community channels through which subsidies are distributed. Community resources, including subsidies, belong to the formal sector because they reflect established public policy and are highly regulated in terms of application procedures, eligibility, and use. They also are associated with public institutions. For example, information on the program Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) is disseminated through institutions such as schools and hospitals. Qualified families are identified via the same channels. The formal subsidy sector is not entirely unavailable to undocumented Mexican families. Health care for their US-born children, or for the pregnant women, can be obtained if people know what agency to contact, what paperwork to fill out, and if they have supporting documents (green card is not always required) such as check stubs to prove low income. The families, however, have difficulty reading information, filling out forms, talking to personnel, or following application steps that require familiarity with the formal process.

Undocumented families are more closely connected to the informal subsidy sector, programs that require no documents or applications, no specific eligibility, or have requirements that can be circumvented. Examples are church-sponsored programs, or food programs for children at school. Such programs are also important because their primary objective is to fulfill basic needs, such as food or clothing, to needy families regardless of minority or legal status. Their use, however, requires that the family and the subsidy source be linked through means which serve as information channels and which facilitate subsidy delivery.

According to Carlos (1981:4):

... networks form the most important and effective basis through which families and households link up with social institutions, including those which deliver social services. ... without these contacts, especially those provided by information brokers and networks, families and households can and do fail to establish an interface relationship with social institutions and can therefore be effectively disconnected from the services which these institutions provide. ... All networks have brokerage functions and brokers. ... These are key individuals in a network who serve as intermediaries and provide services, favors, and information to other individuals.

The women in this study contribute to their families' survival by functioning as brokers between the family and service institutions. Their domestic responsibilities facilitate the broker function. For instance, child care responsibilities provide them opportunities to interact with institutions and key personnel and to learn about available services and eligibility criteria. As women enroll their children for school or day-care, they are referred to health care facilities for vaccinations, and they learn about lunch programs for school children.

Women have definite criteria for accepting or using resources. For example, while I was working with women in the blueberry fields, news reached us that a church group would be coming to the camp to distribute clothing. Arrangements among women quickly were made as to the time they would leave work, with whom (ride arrangements), what kind of clothing was being given, and what time they could return to the fields: "Que van a dar? Dicen que hay ropa de niños y tambien para hombres. Si nos vamos a las tres, podemos devolvemos aunque sea un rato mas." ("What will they give? They say there will be children's clothing and also some for men. If we go at three, we can return for at least a while yet.") Although the blueberry work represented the only subsistence work available at the time, the prospect of a needed subsidy could not be passed up. But in another instance, women did not leave work because the subsidy consisted of poultry. The women simply explained that they didn't want chicken. This seems surprising until one remembers the refrigeration and storage problems migrant families face, and that shigella was a serious problem that year. In their subsidy roles, women gather knowledge about and secure resources. They carefully examine and test information on subsidy resources, and weigh potential problems against benefits, before the family's use.

The subsidy role is similar to the subsistence role in that both represent strategies for survival developed within the confines of the family's development cycle. Children are directly related to women's subsidy roles. As previously noted, all but one of the migrant families had children. Childless families are at a disadvantage in that they are not well connected to the information network, which is formed by mothers. As a consequence, learning about and using assistance for their families is difficult. Although the few subsidies that exist are primarily for families, they are targeted at women. To hold the subsidy role, a woman must therefore meet two basic criteria: live within the family, and be a mother. In the case of one childless couple in the camp (not part of the study group), the man's meager wages left them nearly destitute while the woman was bed-ridden. Relief was difficult to get, as food vouchers were dispensed through the day-care center and intended for affiliated families. Weeks passed before others learned of the problem and offered help.

Women form the network that Carlos (1981) views as the

means to secure services. Using this network, they direct and advise family members on what leads to follow and resources to use. Although all the families at some time face the threat of hunger and lack of housing, food and shelter are the first to be secured. In such a setting, where resources are scarce and isolation is evident, securing these needs testifies to a well developed subsidy role. It also demonstrates the critical function of the network, and the effectiveness of its use.

The well developed subsidy role reinforces the view of woman as "helper" and of her economic activities as "supplemental." The subsidies that women secure cannot alone sustain the family. They are means by which the family gets by, and so are necessary income supplements. Men's earnings also are insufficient to sustain a family, yet they are never viewed as supplemental to what women provide. This paradox is explained by the fact that by procuring subsidies, women confirm the status of the family as economically marginal, for this is the basic criterion for qualifying for, and obtaining, subsidies in the first place. Therefore, women's subsidy roles and contributions are fused with the family's needs that remain after work income is used. Conversely, income associated with men's work reinforces subjective mobility, as described earlier. Income from "men's" work is viewed as the likeliest means by which affiliation with the informal sector can be overcome and socioeconomic equality with the host community achieved. The subsidy role behaviorally contradicts, but fails to change gender ideology.

**WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE ROLES.** The adverse conditions described earlier make health care necessary. Women's ability to optimize health care resources is a valuable family asset. The family views health maintenance, at least to the degree that ill health will not impede economically productive activity, as a priority. The priority reflects the family's pragmatic assessment of its precarious health condition and its constant need to pursue economic activities. Women are in charge of all matters pertaining to their families' health. They employ the information network to optimize family health by seeking, screening, and using information on health-related services, facilities, providers, and programs. In their health roles within the home, women recommend, administer, monitor, and modify medications and home care prescribed by health care professionals. They accompany or refer family members to consultations with doctors, dentists, and other health care facilities and providers, and they have an up-to-date knowledge of health care resources. Family members and others whose health behavior women guide adhere closely to the advice, demonstrating that women's health roles play a central part in family survival.

The health conditions of the families also represent an obstacle to women's emancipation. Because health status is poor and health care frequently needed, women are bound to their health care-seeking activities, which make women valuable to their families, but also confirm the view of women's contributions as "supplemental" to those of men. Health care, while essential, does not replace income. In addition, the conditions pose insurmountable problems to women. They cannot, for example, prevent family members from contracting bronchial infections, work injuries, or skin reactions to pesticides when inadequate housing or unsafe work environments are unavoidable.

The family's health conditions contribute to the differential

status between men and women. Some specific health problems and needs of women and their children are unmet, such as culturally appropriate mental health care for dealing with physical abuse. Women are, as a consequence, denied avenues for improving their lives and escaping the conditions that subordinate them, especially in the area of appropriate protective and preventive mental health services for battered women. Women lack the means to leave an abusive husband and improve the family situation. Undocumented Mexican migrant women suffer from the neglect of their needs as migrants, as women, and as members of a minority. Occupational hazards, migration, poor housing, endemic illness, and other problems that the families face, are poignant concerns to women who give principal importance to family and their own roles within it.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

The study demonstrates that the relative status of men and women is shaped by the surrounding material conditions. Roles and statuses of both men and women are manifestations of the family's response to the constraints and opportunities surrounding it. Regional differences and specific characteristics are the settings in which adaptive strategies are formed and operationalized. Migrants' choices are further limited by their inferior status within the larger society. The stage of the family cycle is important to the development of strategies, because it determines the range of possible responses that the household can make to surrounding conditions. Conversely, household composition is a product of local characteristics, such as the absence of female-headed households in this male-dominated agricultural economy. The relationship of the migrant population segment to the host community is determined largely by the latter through its socioeconomic and sociopolitical advantage. Therefore, local characteristics determine family adaptation by establishing the degree to which it may interact in the community. They also determine the development of adaptive strategies by allowing or disallowing households at particular stages of the family cycle. By so doing, they restrict and dictate the roles that can emerge, and the relative status that roles are assigned.

I stated at the beginning of this paper that I view gender structure as malleable. Yet I have shown that women's status remains subordinate to men's, even when role behavior changes. This inconsistency demonstrates the dichotomous nature of gender structure and the differential influence of conditions on ideology and behavior. The dichotomy allows behaviors to respond to immediate problems, and ideology to make sense of them in culturally consistent ways, as women's use of rationales regarding work policies shows.

Ideology is interpreted differentially by men and women, when conditions affect the genders differently. In the study group, men and women share problems as members of an undocumented population, but the effects on men differ from those on women. The disadvantages women face through work and through health prevent them from changing the subordinating ideology. In this way, conditions maintain the ideological gender hierarchy which men and women share. On the other hand, women also view their contributions as paramount to family survival, and conditions sustain this view. Women refute the subordinating ideology through their subsistence work and work as labor reserves, through their subsidy roles, and through their health-related contributions. Women are subor-

dated within the home because they are subordinated within the workplace and in the host society. Their interpretations of ideology and their behavioral responses are shaped by their experiences as members of their undocumented group, as workers, as health care providers, and as society members. Wife-beating, for example, is related to the differential interpretation of gender ideology by men and by women. While the ideology does not condone wife abuse, nor do women accept it as legitimate, it represents a product of the disadvantages women face as ethnics in a host community, and of the subordination of women that it promotes.

### *NOTES*

<sup>1</sup> The women in the present study are Mexicanas not Chicanas. The difference involves immigrant vs. minority status, and their respective social, economic and political experiences.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to these eleven families, three others were formed by Anglo wives and husbands from Michoacan, but were not studied in depth because they were less accessible (i.e., lived farther away and the wives held regular 40-hour per week employment), and because the project aimed at understanding the adaptations and status of the Mexican women.

<sup>3</sup> Analysis is based on the ethnographic present. Some conditions change yearly, such as agricultural production and its labor demands, population changes, and other factors relevant to the analysis.

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