

## Working Mothers and Family Strategies: Portuguese and Colombian Immigrant Women in a New England Community

*Louise Lamphere*

The lives of immigrant women are powerfully shaped by the nature of the local economies that receive them. As more and more research is conducted on immigrant women, both in the past and the present, we are beginning to understand better the complex relationships between the receiving economy, the immigrant family, and social change. These relationships intersect vividly when women's participation in the wage labor force is considered. In this essay I will examine changes made by Portuguese and Colombian women who immigrated to a textile milltown in New England during the 1970s. There the need for dual workers within families has changed the allocation of reproductive labor within the household, and the gender roles within the family have begun to change as well.

To understand the variety of strategies forged by women migrants, we must focus on the structure of a local economy, women as members of the family unit, and the timing of immigration within a family's life cycle. Each of these features constrains women's strategies and shapes the allocation of productive and reproductive labor. First, it is important to examine the economy of a town or city and the way its structure and economic development have conditioned labor demands. An expanding economy will attract immigrants, but will use male and female labor in different ways, depending on whether steel mills, mines, textile mills or hospitals are the dominant employers. Even within one industry, such as textiles or jewelry, the sex-segregated nature of jobs will mean that men have higher wages than women. And a declining economy may mean that fathers suffer lay-offs, that wives and mothers search for employment, or that sons and daughters cannot find jobs.

Second, the place of immigrant men in the local economy will have an important impact on what roles women will play in immigrant families. Thus, women cannot be treated in isolation from men or from the family units of which they are a part. Women may be wives who immigrate with their husbands or join them later. Or they may be daughters who leave families to migrate and send money home, eventually bringing sisters, brothers, and parents to the new situation. Even if they marry and cut off connections with their kin abroad, their new marital status places them within another family with its own dynamic. Finally, the timing of migration in relation to a woman's life cycle and that of her family often has consequences for women's strategies. Wives in young families find themselves in a much different position than older women who have teenage sons and daughters. Although the structure of the local economy, including the gender typing of available employment, has the most "weight" in limiting women's strategies, the roles of women within the family (as wives, mothers, and daughters) and the family's stage in a developmental cycle also shape the possibilities. In examining data from lengthy interviews with fifteen Azorean and continental Portuguese families and with fifteen Colombian couples, we will see how these factors impact on women's strategies.

### THE HISTORICAL CONTRAST

Our data deal with dual-worker families where wives and mothers were employed full time and had young children seven years or under at the time of our interviews.<sup>1</sup> This situation contrasts markedly with that of women immigrants of 60 years ago. During the first three decades of the 20th century, the Rhode Island economy and that of our study communities, Weaverton and Wierville, was dominated by the textile economy.<sup>2</sup> In a period of expansion (1870-90) and a period of stabilization (1890-1920), waves of immigrants were pulled into Weaverton to provide labor for the expanding family-owned mills. Among the "newer" immigrants who came from southern and eastern Europe after 1900 were a number of Portuguese. Most migrated either as young nuclear families or as single adult males. Virtually no single women migrated, meaning that women's experiences were as wives and mothers, not as young working women who were boarders in others' homes. By and large young fathers and single men held low-paying jobs in textile mills or they worked in coal yards, produce houses, slaughter houses, or small shops. A significant number worked on farms, mainly as male laborers. Portuguese male wages were generally below average, just above the lowest-paid Syrians and Italians, and those who supported a family were undoubtedly hard-pressed financially.

Since most Portuguese women immigrated as young wives and mothers, their time and energy was spent in the reproductive labor necessary to raise their children and cook and clean for their husbands. At a time when the majority of unemployed women were daughters living at home, few Portuguese households had young females between the ages of 14 and 25 who

could be placed in the mills in semiskilled jobs as winders, twisters, and spinners. A number of women took in boarders, however, extending their reproductive labor to provide for single male migrants and add cash to the family income. Several lived in extended families that provided an additional wage worker or a mother-in-law who could provide childcare for a working mother. Even in nuclear families, a few mothers worked for wages outside the home, and in two extended families in our interviews, women worked at home pulling or clipping lace for local textile mills.

As Portuguese daughters reached 14, they too went into the mills (as did their English, French Canadian, and Polish counterparts), but for most Portuguese families, this happened in the 1920s. By this time, there were a number of Portuguese wage-earning daughters, many of whom were active participants in the 1922 textile strike, a general strike that shut down the Rhode Island textile mills for most of the year. For example, a number of young militant Portuguese women participated in a mass demonstration and confrontation with the police in Wierville, which resulted in the shooting and death of a young Portuguese male, after the police fired on the assembled crowd. These women were undoubtedly working daughters whose wages were crucial to the support of their families.

Thus, in the early 20th century when Portuguese families were drawn into the Weaverton and Wierville economy, men occupied most of the productive wage jobs. Wage-earning women were primarily daughters and not wives. A very small number of young mothers worked outside the home, and some expanded their reproductive labor in the home to bring in cash. These family strategies for allocating productive and reproductive labor did not change or challenge the pre-immigration divisions of labor within the family. Men did most of the productive labor (for wages rather than as rural tenant farmers), and women primarily did reproductive work. Daughters could be brought into the wage labor force as the family matured without a disruption of these roles. I would argue that these strategies were not so much a result of Portuguese conceptions and values, but of the structure of the textile industry and the nature of industrial capitalism in the early 20th century.

### COLOMBIAN AND PORTUGUESE IMMIGRATION IN THE 1970S

In examining the allocation of productive and reproductive labor among Colombian and Portuguese immigrants who came to Weaverton in the late 1960s and early 1970s, we see a new set of strategies. Among couples in their 20s and 30s, wives as well as husbands are working for wages. In interviewing these new immigrants we particularly sought out families with young children where husbands and wives worked full time. In focusing on these families, we hoped to find those where the greatest changes would have taken place, since the burden of reproductive labor is greater for families with small children and since full-time labor force participation would take the mother away from the home at least 40 hours a week and create a need for replacing her labor.

Unlike our historical data which allowed us only to outline variations in wage labor arrangements within households, intensive interviews have provided data on the actual allocation of household and childcare tasks, information on how decisions were made in the home, and commentary on how husbands and wives viewed their roles and recent changes in them.<sup>3</sup> Thus we were able to understand the cultural construction of reproductive work and the concepts that surrounded family roles. The comparison of Colombian and Portuguese families allows us to understand subtle differences that relate to the timing of an ethnic group's incorporation into a local economy, the "economic niche" a group comes to occupy, and cultural differences.

As in the historical case, the allocation of female labor to a wage job is very much in response to the male's position in the local labor force. Where Portuguese, French Canadian, Irish, and French families needed the wages of working daughters, so Colombian and Portuguese families have needed the wages of wives as well as daughters over the age of 16. Interview data also give us a much better sense of how female wage labor is attuned not only to the wages of fathers and husbands, but also to his loss of employment through lay-offs, plant closings, health-related problems, or other forms of job disruption.

By the 1970s the Weaverton Company economy had been transformed from one entirely dependent on textiles, to a more-mixed industrial base largely composed of small firms and a few branch plants of multinational corporations. The textile industry had experienced a series of declines during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1950s, leaving a number of specialized "narrow fabric" firms as well as some that produced synthetics. Old textile mills housed jewelry, apparel, and toy companies, and several wire-processing plants had moved into the area.

The Colombian husbands we interviewed were specifically recruited to the Weaverton textile mills in the late 1960s during a period of labor shortage. They came as skilled weavers and mechanics from textile mills in two large Colombian cities. Portuguese men, on the other hand, came through a pattern of chain migration to find employment. That is, Colombians were more likely to have come through work contracts, and Portuguese through kin connections. Colombian men immigrated first and then later brought their wives and children to the United States. Although this was also the case for some Portuguese men, in general they were more likely to have migrated as a family unit. Both Colombian and Portuguese men have been influenced by down-turns in the local economy, but they have remained in two different "niches." In 1977, Colombian men were still largely employed in the textile industry, while Portuguese men had a wider distribution of employment, with jobs in the jewelry and wire-processing industries predominating.

Both Colombian and Portuguese men were making relatively low wages for males. Portuguese men were earning both \$2.36 and \$6.50 an hour in 1977, when the minimum wage was \$2.35. Their average wage was \$3.70 per hour, while Colombian men were averaging over \$4.00 per hour.

Portuguese family incomes in 1977 ranged between \$10,900 and \$20,000 per year, when the U.S. median income was \$16,000 for a family of four. Colombian families were slightly better off with incomes ranging from \$11,440 to \$22,000. But these family incomes were all for households where the wife and even a teenage child were employed, indicating that the husband's wage alone would not have supported the entire family.

### FAMILY IDEOLOGIES AND THE REALLOCATION OF REPRODUCTIVE WORK

The cultural conceptions surrounding the roles of husbands and wives, parents and children for the Colombian and Portuguese couples we interviewed include a number of key concepts that together can be thought of as an ideology about family. These include conceptions of the husband as the economic provider, notions surrounding male authority within the family, ideas about gender differences in personality and behavior, and concepts of respect, especially as they apply to the relationship between children and parents. Although we discussed these conceptions as they existed for women and their husbands in 1977, we were able to get a sense of how their notions had changed in response to immigration, the wife's employment, and to other experiences in the United States.

The ideology surrounding family life for Portuguese and Colombian couples showed some similarities, but differences as well. Both groups considered the husband the head of the household and the primary provider. In other words, ideally he was engaged in productive work outside the home. The wife was viewed as the primary child raiser and specialist in domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and sewing. Her work was reproductive labor in the home. Within this similar pattern, the interviews revealed different themes.

For the Portuguese families the role of father/provider was still strongly articulated by the husbands. They worked hard and made sacrifices for the family, demanding respect in return. As one interviewee commented,

As long as they live under my wings I am the boss (i.e., the one who gives the orders is me). No authority will boss my kids around because I am working. I am sacrificing my body to feed them, to clothe them, to get them shoes and to provide a bed for them to sleep in. . . . I'm not going to be sacrificing myself and watch them at the age of 15 or 16 going out for two or three days without coming home.

Since rural values of hard work and family self-sufficiency were also emphasized as virtues for both men and women, women's labor force participation could be rationalized as consistent with these goals, without altering the husband's position as provider and head of the household. Azorean and continental women come to the United States expecting to become employed, and husbands have neither blocked their employment nor felt it has threatened their position as head of household.

Portuguese husbands and wives emphasized that respect for authority and for parents is consciously taught to children. Children's behavior is carefully watched over and controlled, especially that of young girls. Underlying this is the notion that men are stronger and women need to be protected. As one father put it, "The boy, as a man, has another kind of freedom. The woman not as much. The man knows how to defend himself, to take care of himself, and the woman, no." Most fathers thus were careful to keep daughters close to home. One said, "Age doesn't count. Until they get married, they are to stay at home." If they have a boyfriend, "They can talk at the window or the porch. But it must always be at home."

Colombian men also felt strongly about their roles as providers, but this was revealed primarily in their initial opposition to the wife's employment, as I will emphasize below. They seemed less able to reconcile the wife's wage work with their role as provider. They emphasized their authority in the household to a lesser degree, however, than did Portuguese husbands. Colombian men seemed less interested in their control over the wife's paycheck or over household decisions in general. Instead, a male's ability to socialize on his own and have his own autonomous sphere outside the house emerged as important.

Interviews with Colombian couples also revealed a concern for parental respect and control over children. Although they emphasized gender differences, Colombians tended to describe these in terms of a male's "rougher" and a woman's "soft" and compliant personality. These different tendencies created an association of men with power and the ability to "command" and women with duty and obedience. As one Colombian husband described it,

It's a right of feeling oneself to be a man, a male. Well, he thinks himself more powerful, right? From the time the [little boys] begin to understand things, it remains their role to be more powerful than the woman. One can speak to a man more comfortably you know? And more confidently . . . one must treat a woman more sweetly, more respectful, you know? On the other hand, one can treat a male more roughly, right?

Parents were concerned to teach their children Latin customs, to carefully control the behavior of their children, and to bring them up with the proper respect for their heritage. The mother of three boys said that the "male is stronger and more coarse, while the female is more 'domestic.'" She felt that "girls are more quiet than the boys, and the treatment for girls is much, much softer." Her husband felt that the most important thing a parent can teach his children is how to behave and respect his or her elders and superiors. "There is nothing more beautiful," he said, "than to see a child who knows how to behave with and be polite with adults."

These differences between boys and girls are translated into different behavior for men than for women. One man said, "the man is going to be out on the streets more than the woman, the woman is easier to control than the man. The man . . . goes out and he meets a friend, and there he goes."

... if one is not watching him, he'll go and make bad friendships, and so he can get really messed up. On the other hand, the girls can be controlled more easily and kept in the house."

For both groups, notions concerning gender differences and the importance of respect and obedience for parents have changed little, although parents often feel the American situation has a corrupting influence on their children. Family ideology (including notions concerning authority, gender roles, and respect) provides the lens through which comparisons with American families are made and through which their own situation is interpreted. What has changed, however, is associated with the allocation of productive and reproductive labor. A wife's employment has to be accommodated in a way that is seen as compatible with the husband's role as provider and his authority. For Portuguese families, this accommodation has been made easier because of an emphasis on family self-sufficiency and a notion that women are as committed to hard work as men (even though this work may be for wages). Thus we turn to an examination of the way in which Colombian and Portuguese families dealt with the decision for the wife to seek employment outside the home.

#### THE WIFE'S EMPLOYMENT AS A FAMILY STRATEGY

In the early decades of the century, families decided to reallocate their sons and daughters from a position of being maintained or providing supplementary reproductive labor to one of productive work for a wage. In contrast, among contemporary immigrant families, wives and mothers became wage laborers. There were several reasons for this. As the capitalist system expanded, more and more women were pulled into the paid labor force. Beginning with World War II, a growing proportion of these have been married women and mothers. Not only have women continued to be recruited for industrial jobs, but large numbers have been recruited to white-collar clerical and sales jobs, as well as to the expanding service sector. While many daughters of textile mill workers were pulled into these working-class white-collar jobs, the remaining industries have continued to use female labor especially in semi-skilled positions, which have historically been defined as female (spinning and braider tending in textiles, sewing in the apparel industry, and various kinds of soldering and linking jobs in jewelry). In Weaverton and Wierville, women in these jobs by the 1970s included a number of married women as well as single women. Thus Colombian and Portuguese immigrants entered a labor market where employers welcomed married women. In the textile industry there was not only a shortage of skilled males, but a need for semiskilled females. In the first instance, the husband's job could not support the family, and both Colombian and Portuguese couples concluded that the wife's employment was necessary. How this decision was arrived at and its implications for transforming cultural conceptions of family roles was slightly different for each group.

In the Colombian case, some wives arrived a few months after the

husband's initial migration. Others arrived several years later and in one instance, the father brought each of the oldest children to the United States in succession (a daughter and two sons) before the wife and younger children arrived. Characteristically, the couple decided shortly after the wife's arrival that it would be advantageous for the wife to work outside the home.

In Colombian families, however, there seemed to be extensive opposition from the husband to the wife's employment. For example, one woman said, "My husband didn't like me going to work and leaving the children alone, but this poverty made us accept it." Her husband also commented that he did not like the idea because it was not the custom in their own country, but necessity obliged him to conform to the new situation of having his wife work. One father, who was unemployed at the time of our interviews, also felt that his wife's working was a necessity. He expected that she would return to work after having her baby, but in the end he hoped that she would not have to work. "Well, it would be good that she return for . . . well for four or five months, and after that, no. Yes, because it will be harder then; there will be two children to watch."

The man who was perhaps the most adamant about his wife not working outside the home said he was, at first, very upset because he was raised with the idea that married women do not work outside their homes. But when he thought about it, he decided that the financial obligations of raising a family would be hard in this country if he tried to do it himself. His wife reported that she wanted the experience of working, since her father had not allowed her to work for wages and, more important, she wanted to send money to her sisters in Colombia. She opened a savings account and convinced her husband that she needed to put money in the account monthly, so he let her work.

Another man had perhaps the clearest analysis of the tie between a husband's position as head of the household and the desire of men not to have their wives working in Colombia. "Over there, one isn't accustomed. . . . In our country the wife is not accustomed to working, because it's a dishonor. The guy who gets married and his wife still keeps on working, it's like a dishonor [deshonora] that the wife has to keep on working . . . as many people would probably say, to keep on supporting part of the household obligations." Here the notion of husband as economic provider is bound up with conceptions of honor, and work is an ideology that ratifies the allocation of the husband to productive work and the wife to reproductive labor in the home.

In other Colombian families, the decision for the wife to work for wages seemed to be by mutual consent, arrived at shortly after the wife came to the United States. Economic reasons were primary, but new immigrants also realized that the customary practices of Americans were different, and they soon met a number of Colombian families in which the wife worked. Employed wives were often important in convincing a new immigrant wife that working would be good for them and for the family. The organization of reproductive labor in the U.S. is much different than in the past and in



much of the Third World. Since cooking, shopping, and laundry are not nearly as time-consuming and laborious, women are potentially freed for wage labor. In addition, the social organization of reproductive work is different. In Colombia, women were enmeshed in a network of kin, neighbors, and friends and were able to carry on a social life as part of their roles as wives and mothers. The residential dispersion of the new Colombian community in Weaverton, the fact that other wives were employed, and the lack of female kin, as well as the cold winter weather, all contributed to a feeling of isolation.

Among the Portuguese men interviewed there was much less resistance to the wife's employment than among the Colombian men. The tone of many Portuguese interviews was that the dual-worker strategy was a necessity and obvious, given their economic circumstances, and to be accepted. One man, for example, said, "From the Azorean end, they always depend on work. They [Azoreans] continue working, . . . want the work and want the money. Without the work, the money doesn't come."

Portuguese women also emphasized the financial reasons for employment, indicating their consciousness of the need for a second wage in the family. For example, one said, "With only one paycheck it isn't enough." And her husband concurred: "We have to have the money [so it is necessary] for all of us to work, isn't that so?"

Some couples were particularly articulate about high expenses and the debts that accumulated soon after arrival in the United States. One wife said,

What I find, . . . how can I say it? One knows that in the beginning we find big problems. We arrive, from the beginning we have to start buying our things and a house with [many] people with only two checks, it is a little hard. There I didn't work; here I have to work. I have to come home and take care of my life. One knows that my daughters help me a bit, but I still have to orient things, and sometimes I don't feel like it.

In another case, the wife as a child had helped her father in the fields, had held two paid jobs in the Azores, and then had worked in Massachusetts when her family immigrated to the United States. Both husband and wife reported that it was natural for her to continue work after marriage. "I have always liked working," she said. "I loved to work in the fields. . . . I would plant corn, prune it, plant potatoes and after I would take them out. We would bunch everything together and put it, on top inside a box. When it was time for the corn [to be picked] we would take the leaves, take the corn, pull off the leaves and my father would sell it." After her marriage, she continued to work for wages to pay for the bills accumulated in setting up a new house and "because I set up a new life."

For both Colombian and Portuguese families, as the years pass after initial immigration, women's productive employment continues to be sensitive to and often shaped by the husband's employment. Men's work histories were filled with job changes. Many of these were the result of lay-offs, particu-

larly prevalent in a declining economy where small firms were often on the brink of closing (as in textiles) or where production is seasonal (jewelry and apparel). Men also were forced out of jobs for health-related reasons, or quit to take a better-paying job. Women suffered job loss through lay-offs as well, but their reproductive work at home was also an issue. One mother pulled out of wage jobs when she had to care for her convalescing husband or had the responsibility of a young baby. Another anticipated finding a job on another shift, once her husband was reemployed, to fit dual-worker employment with their childcare responsibilities. Unlike the era of working daughters, where female employment added to the family income but did not change the organization of reproductive labor, in the present era where wives and mothers are employed there is a fine-tuning of a family's allocation of productive and reproductive labor so that female employment not only is related to male employment, but also impacts on the action organization of reproductive tasks in the home.

The cultural construction of a wife's employment echoes the realities of male wage and employment patterns. Both husbands and wives talk about the financial necessity of women's wage work and emphasize that one male paycheck is not enough. The fact of female employment has been followed by an adjustment in the conception of how productive labor is allocated in the family. Colombian men were more resistant to changing their notions of male and female employment roles than either Colombian women or Portuguese husbands and wives. Several connected the inability for a male to be the provider with dishonor, but others, like many Portuguese men, began to emphasize "necessity." Both men and women, especially the Portuguese, emphasized the importance of hard work for family members, regardless of gender and age, if the family is to adapt to local economy. Some see the "environment" as different in the United States, rationalizing the wife's employment in a context where there are many other working wives, including some from their own ethnic background. Once women are employed, however, this reallocation of productive labor brings changes in two areas of reproductive work: childcare and household chores.

### THE WORKING MOTHER AND THE REALLOCATION OF CHILDCARE

Daughters were able to work for wages without a major reallocation of reproductive work in the home. But when Portuguese and Colombian women in the late 1960s and early 1970s took wage jobs in Weaverton, both husbands and wives began to change the gender division of tasks in the home. The set of activities that altered the most were those surrounding childcare, particularly because the families we interviewed had young children under school age.

Most couples have reallocated the labor of childcare by the husband and wife working on different shifts. This has meant that husbands have done more work and taken more childcare responsibility, depending on the age of the child and the particular shift he is working. In some respects this is an outcome of the wage structure of the jobs husbands and wives hold. The

relatively low combined wages of a working couple (either Portuguese or Colombian) prevents them from using daycare centers. A daycare fee of \$35 a week in 1977 would have come from a woman's take-home pay of between \$80 and \$105 a week. Even for the Colombian couples who have hired baby sitters, the fee of \$15 to \$25 a week was a substantial amount. Both Portuguese and Colombian women felt that they would have used a close relative for daycare, but many Colombian families had few relatives in the United States in 1977, and in many of the Portuguese families sisters or sisters-in-law were also employed outside the home. The strategy of coping with childcare by working on different shifts thus made sense given the difficulties of making other arrangements.

The strategy is also shaped by the character of the local economy and the family's stage in the life cycle. The strategy is possible, of course, because Weaverton's local economy includes many firms that operate on two or three shifts. The textile industry and insulated-wire plants all involve heavy machinery, which is most profitably operated around the clock. Textile firms began operating two and three shifts during the 1920s and 1930s when the maximum workweek was reduced from 56 to 48 hours a week, making it possible to run more than one shift. The 40-hour week mandated during the 1930s made a three-shift system possible, although many plants were not able to run three shifts during the decline of the 1930s. During World War II and in the postwar period, a return to three shifts occurred. In the Weaverton jewelry industry, a second shift is often added during the busy seasons and for small detail and finish work (for which women are often employed).

A couple's stage in a family developmental cycle and the age of their children also affected how a couple utilized the two-shift strategy or what other arrangements they made to supplement it. On the whole, the two shift eleven Azorean and four Continental Portuguese families had more children and more older children than did the Colombian couples. Most couples worked on different shifts, unless there were older children to look after the youngest between the end of school at 2:30 P.M. and the time the parents arrived home (between 3:30 and 4:30 P.M.).

Fathers who worked the third shift often got their children up and off to school after they arrived home in the morning. Some fathers also looked after a young child during the day, catching naps in between watching the child. Some fathers found this a difficult situation. For example, one would have preferred that his wife care for the children or that they use a childcare center. Of a center he said, "I think it's better, because the mother isn't here and of course I'm a man. It makes a difference in the home life, having to take care of the children." He described the problems of trying to sleep after working an all-night shift and looking after three children, aged 9, 7, and 6. "I would like to get another job, because, you see, this shift is very bad for me. Sleeping like this has caused my head to feel very strange and about two or three weeks ago, I felt something. . . . I had dizzy spells. . . . Maybe I'll sleep, but I'm always thinking about them because they are still young."

Nine out of fourteen Colombian families, like the Portuguese immigrants, also used the strategy of working alternate shifts to accommodate childcare

within the nuclear family. Similar combinations of shifts were also apparent. One mother worked the third shift, while her husband was employed on the first shift. In three other Colombian families the reverse was true. In these cases, as in four Portuguese households, the father worked the third shift and the wife was employed on the first shift. In four other families, one parent worked first shift and the other second shift. Compared to the Portuguese families, Colombian couples were at an earlier stage in their family cycle. They had more babies and infants, while in many Portuguese families, the youngest child was already 6 or 7 years old. This meant that fewer Colombian families could rely on older children as supplementary baby sitters.

Of the remaining six families, in four a female relative, Colombian neighbor, or friend cared for the child, and in two the oldest children took care of the youngest after school or in the evening while the parents were at work. Like families where parents worked different shifts, comments made by some of these parents indicated that both husbands and wives thought a woman's care is best. For these families, if the wife was working, then a relative or woman of the same ethnic background was appropriate. Others felt that a husband's care was preferable to a stranger or someone who did not share one's own attitudes about childrearing. Thus some families were not satisfied with baby sitters who are not relatives. One Colombian woman said of a Colombian friend who cared for their children while the parents worked second shift:

[My friend] is a very nice person and she takes good care of them. However, when I am home, by 9 p.m. they are bathed and in bed. Sometimes we get home at 11 and they are still up. I don't think that's right. The next day they have to get up very early and they are very small to go to bed so late. It's a problem. One is locked up in a factory and doesn't know what they are doing.

Most said they would not use a daycare center, although in many cases this may have been based on knowledge of the Colombian daycare centers, which are used only by the very poor and are stigmatized as inadequate childcare facilities. Experience with U.S. daycare centers does seem to be changing these attitudes. One mother felt that a daycare center would be a good choice, based on the experience of a friend.

She pays 15 dollars and my friend told me they are very nice. If I have to decide between a daycare center and a Colombian lady to take care of my child, I would choose a daycare center. Because the Colombian woman might have other children of her own to take care of and she would neglect mine. At least that's my opinion. Instead, in a daycare center, they would have to take care of them all the same way.

For some Portuguese families, there was also a sense that childcare should be primarily provided by the mother. One woman said, "There's always something missing when a mother isn't at home." In addition,

Portuguese parents had similar attitudes about the use of baby sitters and daycare centers. Few had any real knowledge of childcare centers in the U.S. Some based their comments on the few childcare centers (*creches*) in the Azores, which are often thought of only for the poor and as providing only the most minimal institutional care. One Portuguese father was one of the few parents who had used a daycare center, but when the staff neglected to change his daughter after she accidentally wet her pants, he took her out of the center, and cared for her during the day after he returned home from working the third shift. On the other hand, when another mother moved to Wierville, she looked for a daycare center because she and her husband were working the same shift and had two small children. But when she finally found one she could not afford the \$35 a week. "If there was a cheaper daycare facility, it would be good especially for the immigrant when he arrives here. Since I've been here in the U.S., I've noticed that there's a real need."

In general, the reallocation of labor surrounding childcare through shift work must be seen as part of a couple's general juggling of two wage jobs, where one member of the couple may be laid off, suffer health problems, or seek a job with a higher wage. At one point in their dual-worker history, a couple may opt for one form of childcare (e.g., working on differential shifts). At another time, using another strategy (a baby sitter or a mother or sister) may seem the best option (if both have jobs that are relatively well-paying, and if the mother is available or the sister is not working). In some instances the husband has insisted that the wife change her job to be at home with the children during the day, while at other times, the husband has stepped in to care for a child when a baby-sitter has returned to work. And in still other cases, the husband has been laid off, the wife has sought a job, and the husband has taken care of the children. Men have thus changed their behavior. They have become more involved in childcare tasks, especially those who have responsibility for young children during the day or older children while a wife works on the second shift.

### CHANGES IN THE ALLOCATION OF HOUSEHOLD TASKS

Many fewer changes have taken place in the reallocation of labor concerned with daily maintenance, those tasks we are likely to label "housework." In our interviews we asked both husbands and wives to tell us who did each of a list of household chores as well as who was responsible for seeing that the chores were completed. We included a number of tasks generally done by women: cooking meals, washing dishes, cleaning the bathroom, laundry, washing the floor, vacuuming, etc., as well as a number of chores often done by men: taking out the garbage, caring for the car, doing minor repairs, taking care of the yard, and maintenance or repair of plumbing and electricity. In addition, we obtained from both husband and wife a typical daily schedule for weekdays and weekends, so that we had additional accounts of how housework and maintenance chores fit into the husband's

and wife's work schedule. Finally, we asked how decisions were made about larger purchases and how finances were handled.

In both Portuguese and Colombian samples, the traditional division of labor was still followed, as it had been before immigration. Wives were usually responsible for cooking and cleaning, while the husband was responsible for household repairs and the care of the car. In some cases, the husband also held the major responsibility for the finances, but here, as in some other household chores, the wife's employment had brought changes. Some of the reallocation of housework had come from an incorporation of children, primarily daughters, a strategy that might have been used in the pre-immigration situation under conditions where the wife was not working for wages. In many families the husband has also begun to do housework. How much the husband was doing in 1977 varied considerably. On the whole, Portuguese and Colombian men engaged in more household activities than they had before immigration, partly because the structure of these chores is much different in the United States. For example, few Azorean and Colombian women here drive cars, so the couple often shopped jointly for food and clothing. The husband also took the washing to the laundromat. Some Portuguese husbands made beds and participated in some of the housecleaning, and a few Colombian men vacuumed and even cooked. A few examples will illustrate the variation among Portuguese couples. One wife reported that on Saturday mornings after she came home from working all night, she went to bed and slept until 10 A.M. When she got up, her husband would have the house cleaned. Another husband, who was disabled, had taken over many of the household chores during the daytime, though he still felt uncomfortable in this role.

In here, it has been slightly different because she had to work and she couldn't look after the children. . . . I'll tell you frankly, I used to change diapers for my children. . . . But I'm not ashamed to say that I changed diapers, and what's more, I also washed them and ironed them before putting them on my kids. . . . It's the life of an immigrant. And I'm not ashamed of it. . . . Just today . . . she made her bed . . . our bed. But most of the time, I'm the one who does it. I clear the table, set it, you know, put the things she wants on it, all straight, or I put things away. I can't do as good a job as she does, I can't do it because let's face it, a woman is a woman and a man is a man. But at least she arrives home and doesn't see . . . a shoe over here . . . a towel over there. No, nothing is out of place. I help her in what I can. That's life, all that is part of life.

A third husband wanted to decrease his participation and return to the more-traditional division of labor. He had been taking care of his children while his wife worked the second shift. He said he was "*saturado*" (He'd had it), and he encouraged his wife to change to the first shift, using a neighbor as a baby sitter.

In many Azorean families, the husband was clearly still in charge of the

finances. The older children usually followed Azorean custom and handed over their paychecks to their father. Often, in the American context, the son or daughter paid the bills, because they had the English language skills to do so, but the father generally remained in charge of the allocation of funds. One father described how financial arrangements worked in his family with an employed wife and an employed 16-year-old son: "No, I am the one who is in charge of the money. We all do it together. I come home, I tell them what's what, you see, but they do the same to me. For example, if the son goes shopping with his brothers, he must tell me what was spent." In other families decision-making on financial issues was done more jointly.

For example, one husband handled the finances, according to his wife, but they cashed their checks together and then decided how to spend the money. In the case of a younger couple, the wife explained that her husband took care of the money. Their paychecks were put together and all the bills were paid, and what was left over was theirs. The husband also saw their situation as one of consultation. "Until this day, I never decided anything without talking it over with her together. And I enjoy it this way, because we can't blame the other. If it's good, it's for both of us and if it's bad, the same."

There was also a good deal of variation among Colombian husbands in their degree of participation in household tasks that would have normally been labeled "women's work." One wife made the following remarks about her husband's participation: "Nobody takes him away from the TV. . . . He doesn't help around the house for anything . . . and I have to fight with him so that he will wash a plate. No, that one is very lazy." Others received more help from their husband after they were employed outside the home.

Many things have changed since I started to work. He picks the baby up. However, I am the one who does most of the kitchen and household chores. I continue being in charge of the kitchen. The majority of the household chores are my duty. My husband helps me a little and my little sister [who had just arrived in the U.S. and was temporarily living with the family] helps me once in a while.

Here we see a confirmation of the pattern that the husband's initial involvement in reproductive labor may come in the area of childcare, while the wife continues to do much of the work involved in transforming purchased commodities into meals or maintenance work such as cleaning and laundry.

In both Portuguese and Colombian families, the stage of her family life cycle also shaped a husband's participation in housework. In these families whose children were older and felt to be more responsible, they had an important role in the chores. In a family with three children—two daughters of 13 and 12 and a son of 9—the girls took turns with the housework. Each week, one girl did the kitchen and the other cleaned and made the beds. The boy vacuumed the floor. The father had been involved in some of the housework, but his involvement was being replaced by the daughters as they were trained in female work.

Almost all the husbands and wives—both Colombian and Portuguese—commented on the double burden that wives face when working both at home and in the factory. Most women complained of being tired from holding down two jobs and of the difficulties of leaving the children with their husbands, a relative, or a baby sitter. One woman gave perhaps the most specific analysis of women's "double day":

In Portugal, I wasn't thinking of this so much because I wasn't working, you know. Things went along, that is, I had the day and it was my own, you know. I think that an operator's job, practically there are two shifts that you have to do. Because you have to work a shift in the factory and after you have to do the other one. That is, I noticed that I am more tired with more work, you know. I'm not just fatigued by the factory but by the home life as well. It's this that makes the difference.

A Colombian mother, expressed some of the same sentiments: "Do you know what it is to live 8 hours at work, all locked up and then to come home to be locked up again? When I come home, I still have to cook, fix the house, fix clothing for all to wear the next day. And if I go out for a ride, when I come home I still have all those chores to do, so what time do I go to bed then?"

Yet it is also fair to say that men are doing more of the reproductive tasks defined as "female" than they had done in the pre-immigration situation. In some families, wives seem to be pressing for more participation, while in others, necessity (the wife's work on second shift, the husband's disability) has put him in a position where more housework and childcare had to be done. In sum, the era of the working mother has brought about a reallocation of reproductive labor that did not take place earlier in the century when the majority of those working in the labor force were daughters.

## CONCLUSION

In this essay I have argued that the analysis of the lives of immigrant women must take place within a framework that is sensitive to the particular economic and historical context in which women find themselves. In examining the strategies used by Colombian and Portuguese families in reallocating productive and reproductive labor, I have emphasized the role of the economy in shaping these strategies. The firms that remained in textiles and those in apparel, costume jewelry, and wire processing actively recruited immigrant labor (in the case of textiles) and welcomed new immigrants already in New England and seeking work. Given the gender-typing of jobs within these firms, there was a need for female as well as male labor, and a situation existed where male wages were insufficient to support an immigrant family. This situation pushed wives and mothers to take up wage employment, which had important consequences for the reallocation of reproductive labor within the household. Husbands began to



participate more in childcare and even in household chores normally defined as "female," especially since many couples dealt with the wife's employment and the need for childcare by working different shifts.

The implicit comparison here is between contemporary wage-earning immigrant mothers and employed daughters from immigrant families during the first three decades of the 20th century. During these years female labor force participation hovered around 20 percent, but most were single young women. In English, Irish, and French Canadian populations in Weaverton, many families were at the stage in the life cycle where they had teenage sons and daughters who worked in the textile mills and machine shops. In the newly arrived Polish population, there were single women who boarded and were employed as well as a number of married women, some of whom were boarders who also worked for wages. In the new Portuguese population, most immigrants were single males and young families. Some of these young wives took in boarders, others cared for relatives who were wage workers or took in homework, while still others were in the position of stretching their husband's wages. These strategies involved shaping and changing a wife's reproductive labor rather than reallocating it among other household members.

The present era thus is one of significant changes in the behavior of men and women in terms of work done in the home. The relationship of this new behavior to cultural conceptions of family roles is a complex one. Some areas are changing. Despite resistance (as exemplified by the Colombian husbands), women and men have come to see women's employment as necessary and even appropriate. This seems to have been an easier adjustment in Portuguese families from a rural tenant farming background, whose values of hard work and family self-sufficiency apply to wives as well as husbands and can be transferred from nonindustrial to industrial contexts. Other conceptions are still maintained, such as the importance of the husband as head of the household, the emphasis on respect by children for parents, and on gender differences between males and females. Here I would argue that the position of couples within the local economy is creating changes in behavior, while the cultural conception of family roles is altering in some ways but not immediately in others. Men seem more resistant to altering their ideas about male authority than do women, but within each sample there was a wide range of variation, both in terms of behavior and ideology. The nature of change is perhaps tentative, but women's employment has clearly gone further in transforming relationships in these immigrant families than it did in earlier generations. It may be that the daughters in these families, growing up in an era where female labor force participation increases and the era of the working mother continues, will go even further in redefining and reconceptualizing their family roles as they enter the labor force for an extended period in their lives.

## NOTES

1. Data were collected as part of a project on "Women, Work, and Ethnicity an Urban Setting," funded by the Center for the Study of Metropolitan Problems, National Institution of Mental Health, Grant No. RO-1-MH 27363.

2. Both names are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of those who were interviewed during the course of the research.

3. Interviews with the Portuguese families were conducted by Filomena Rebecca Matthews, John Sousa, and Carlos Pato. Interviews with Colombian families were conducted by Aida Redondo and Ricardo Anzaldua. Their assistance throughout the project was invaluable.