Understanding the Role of Personal Social Networks in the Lives of Immigrant Hispanic Women: A Case Study of Boston

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the initial and secondary settlement and adaptation patterns of my respondents based upon their available social networks. It also explored the importance of these networks in the employment of my respondents and the use of these networks for childcare needs.

My study suggests that the use of their personal social networks served an important role in their initial and secondary settlement decisions and consequent adaptation in the United States. Fifteen of the eighteen respondents stayed with their personal social networks upon arrival while the other three migrated with their spouses with the help of their networks. Networks were seen mainly as an asset to the settlement of my respondents. Consequently, my respondent’s networks managed to inform and assist ten of the eighteen women with their secondary movement. Four still live in their initial place of residence while two used a social service agency to find housing after their initial settlement.

Even though only seven of the eighteen respondents were employed at the time of this study, six obtained their employment through their personal network. The personal networks served as an important aid in finding work and in removing the obstacles that stand in the way of individuals’ attainment of employment, such as childcare. However, my study suggests that one needs a strong, unemployed social network ties in order to be able to rely on networks for regular childcare support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Roots of the Project

As I was growing up I watched as poor female immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua came through my father’s church. Their relatives who were members of the church invited them. My mother would spend Sunday afternoon talking to these new arrivals and eventually find out that they were in search of work. My mother worked as a nurse for a private pediatric doctor in Santa Monica, CA where many of the patient’s mothers worked full-time and so needed someone full-time to help them with the day-to-day needs in the home. Many of the patients would ask if my mother knew of women who would be interested in working as a nanny, live-in domestic, or home cleaner. My mother would tell them of the women in her church. My mother would then report immediately to the women in the church of the job opportunities.

Having observed this common occurrence the thought of studying immigrant Hispanic women lingered in the back of my mind. It wasn’t until my senior year of college (after reading Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo’s *Gendered Transitions*) that I came to understand this phenomenon in a more systematic way. *Gendered Transitions* highlights the significance of networks in the Hispanic community, networks in which my mother played a role. The significance of these women’s networks in the Hispanic community, I came to realize, had not been studied much, hence I felt the need to explore this phenomenon at the micro-level not only for my personal knowledge, but because I feel that this particular sub-group has lacked the attention of scholars. I became interested in this topic because I wanted to understand the settlement processes and how these immigrant groups find jobs, especially Latinas. As I conducted my interviews I
realized how important networks are. Another study on understanding the properties of social networks, that is, the size of the network, the age of the network, contact volume, and composition, would need to be addressed in another study.

Thesis Question

The few scholarly works that I know of that have focused upon the migratory patterns of Hispanic women have dealt with particular racial groups. Mexicans are studied in California\(^1\), Dominicans in New York\(^2\), Cubans in Miami\(^3\), and Salvadorans on Long Island\(^4\). Given my residency in the State of Massachusetts I decided to test the use of personal social networks in the greater Boston area, not necessarily focusing on any particular racial group.\(^5\) My primary question is, what role do the personal social networks of immigrant Hispanic women in the Boston, Massachusetts\(^6\) area play in the transition from their home countries to the United States? How do these networks facilitate the process of obtaining a job, housing, day care, and social service information, while in the United States?

Purpose of this Study

A study looking at the role of personal social networks of immigrant Hispanic women such as this one has not been conducted in the state of Massachusetts. However, studies looking at the role of immigration and the formation of communities have been conducted in the states of

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5. In this study, Boston area refers to residents of Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan. Please see map in the Appendix.
California, Florida, and New York, to name a few. These States were chosen for these particular studies because of the large numbers of Hispanic groups. These states have served as major ports of entry and it has been shown that Hispanic groups tend to congregate in large urban areas. Because of the large Hispanic communities in the Boston area and the fact that it is a major port of entry for Hispanic groups from the Caribbean and Puerto Rico it would not be surprising to find that the process of using personal social networks for one's settlement is utilized. These studies' analysis of the formation of immigrant communities has shown the importance of social networks in the context of settlement and adaptation. However, social networks are not the focus of the studies. Hence, the purpose of this preliminary study is to understand this phenomenon at the micro-level, to determine whether or not social networks and information exchange are the primary facilitator in the settlement of Hispanic women in the Boston area. I propose that personal social networks help facilitate the lives of these Hispanic women. To what degree will be addressed in the following chapters.

Background: defining social networks

Generally, social networks refer to the social relations that "organize and direct the circulation of labor, capital, goods, services, information, and ideologies between migrant

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6 Hispanic, in the city of Boston, means primarily Puerto Rican (42.19%) and Dominican (13.3%), but increasingly a diversity of other national groups as well. [Source: 1990 U.S. Census]
7 For a more detailed look at this study see Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's *Gendered Transitions: Experiences of Mexican Migration* (1994).
8 For a more detailed look at this study see Alejandro Portes and Robert L. Bach’s *Latin Journey* (1985).
9 For a more detailed look at this study see Sherrie Grasmuck and Patricia Pessar’s *Between Two Worlds: Dominican International Migration* (1991); Sarah Mahler’s *Salvadorans in Suburbia* (1995).
10 Information exchange can be transferred either through their networks (i.e. telling them of social service agencies that can assist them with housing or adult basic education) or by exploring the availability of services either through their experience in their home countries or while in the United States.
Social networks and the decision to emigrate have played an important role in the formation of Hispanic communities (niches) in the United States as well as in the building of social capital. United States' immigration policies and the proximity of Latin American countries have facilitated the growing numbers of Hispanic immigrants with much of the migration falling primarily in four urban centers - Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and El Paso. Social networks have allowed many people to decide to emigrate and have facilitated their settlement by providing them with jobs, housing, and in some instances money to establish themselves.

Brief Literature Review

In my review of the literature, I found that scholarly work pertaining to immigration was primarily written in response to labor dynamics in the US and consequently focused upon men's experiences. It wasn't until the 1970s that women's role and struggles to cope with the economic and psychological hardships of immigration have been written about. Much of the research on Hispanic immigration and gender, despite differences in the decision to emigrate, have focused upon the following groups: Dominicans, Mexicans, and more recently, Salvadorans. Much of the experience of these different Hispanic groups has been found to be

11 *Between Two Worlds*, p. 13.
12 *Between Two Worlds*, p. 13.
13 There are other urban centers to which Hispanic immigrant's travel to, but for simplicity I chose the top four.
15 The literature also tried to explain the dynamics involved in particular communities such as acculturation or assimilation. These scholars tried to answer the question, how do these immigrant groups assimilate into mainstream America? Nathan Glazer and Patrick Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* provide an alternative analysis to the acculturation and assimilation analysis of many of the immigration literature. They point out that immigrant groups maintain their ethnicities and that different communities adapt differently to their surrounding.
16 Look at the following works: Silvia Pedraza (1991); Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994); Houstoun et al. (1984).
similar despite cultural differences. However, their social, economic, and political experiences can be said to be different.\textsuperscript{18}

Migration theorists state that the decision to migrate involves an orthodox and unorthodox theory or what are more commonly referred to as micro and macro linkages.\textsuperscript{19} The macrostructural view of migration theory is the \textit{push-pull model}. This model is constructed around "factors of expulsion,"\textsuperscript{20} i.e. economic, social, and political strife in their native countries and "factors of attraction,"\textsuperscript{21} i.e. policies that encourage legal entry into the country with the understanding that they will work in the country to ease the need for low and unskilled labor.

Microstructural decisions to migrate are those that the individual person or family makes. Some factors that facilitate the decision to migrate might include kinship or friend social networks,\textsuperscript{22} immigration laws (Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 which allowed immigrants to enter the country through family reunification), social and economic prospects, etc.\textsuperscript{23}

The study of social networks and international migration flows and settlement has stimulated much research. Social networks based on kinship, friendship, and community ties are central components in migration analysis. "The study of personal networks in migration reveals the importance of social relations in migratory behavior. It provides insight into the origins,

\textsuperscript{18} The Cubans for instance (in \textit{Latin Journey}) that migrated during the 1970s and 1980s were richer, educated professionals escaping the political regime of their home country. Mexicans during the same period were mostly poor, uneducated migrants coming for economic advancement (\textit{Return to Aztlan}).
\textsuperscript{19} Chavez, 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Mahler, 1995; Pedraza, 1991; Piore, 1979; Portes and Bach, 1985; Portes and Rumbaut, 1990.
\textsuperscript{20} Portes and Rumbaut, \textit{Immigrant America}. 1990
\textsuperscript{21} Portes and Rumbaut, \textit{Immigrant America}. 1990
\textsuperscript{22} Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Portes and Bach, 1985
\textsuperscript{23} Portes and Bach, 1985; Portes and Rumbaut, 1990; Piore, 1979
composition, direction, and persistence of migration flows.” Social ties provide information about places of destination and sources of settlement assistance.

In this study, I will be mainly concerned with the role of social networks and how they facilitate the migratory movement and consequently the settlement of female immigrants. Social networks, within the context of immigration, entail the formation of organizations and unorganized arrangements to provide aid (financial, emotional, and informational) to immigrants, whether they are kin or friends (the relationships between kin and friends differ in their degree of assistance).

Larissa Adler Lomnitz wrote in *Networks and Marginality: Life in a Mexican Shantytown*, that networks were a direct result of kinship ties, minimally through *confianza* (trust) and later *compadrazgo* (brotherhood/sisterhood). She defines these kinship ties as either reciprocal or non reciprocal. "Kinship is the most common social foundation for reciprocity networks...on the other hand, many relatives maintain no reciprocal exchange..." Networks built from *confianza* are often minimal, providing only the necessary means of assistance that facilitates some portion of the migratory experience, because it is "egocentric and dyadic." *Compadrazgo* is a formation of non-kin ties. These non-kin ties provide relationships that are not based on trust but on affiliation through family members and friends. In my sample, very few of the female migrants did not have family members in Massachusetts who helped them settle, as will be seen in chapter's three and four.

In *Gendered Transitions*, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo includes the important role of women in the migratory process and their direct association with pre-migratory social networks.

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25 Lomnitz, 1977. Carol Stack’s *All our Kin* shows this reciprocity occurring in the African-American community.
in her study of immigrant Mexicans in California. The author provides an alternative migration theory, "one that acknowledges the place of gender in shaping migration. It analyzes the politics of gender in families and social networks as these relations mediate between macrostructural transformation of a political-economic nature and specific patterns of migration."\(^{28}\) Within this role women had to experience one of two migratory patterns: family stage migration and single women's migration. Through these migratory patterns women sought to form kin ties and community organizations that would aid them in their transition into a new environment.

According to Hondagneu-Sotelo, "family stage migration," defined as the reunification of women and children with their spouses or partners, is one that entails the husband's labor contact as its main social network resource. However, she notes that women's networks also played an important part in the migratory decision. The settlement processes of these women depended upon the connections the husbands made while in the United States. Other connections as well as pre-established networks (either through the wife's relatives or friends) aided women in finding a job, and other necessary public information such as daycare.\(^{29}\)

In some cases where the husband did not want to be reunited with his family, the wife would raise the money herself and facilitate her settlement through the help of "women's helping networks."\(^{30}\) These helping networks, which consisted of women friends or kin, assisted women with information. Thus, family stage migration was abetted by either, the formation of female-based helping networks or the guidance of their husbands newly established connections.

\(^{28}\) Sotelo, p.53.  
\(^{29}\) Sotelo, p. 77, 82.  
\(^{30}\) Sotelo, p. 116.
Single women who pursued migration in Hondagneu's study were at an apparent disadvantage. Their networks consisted of women-to-women links. These women, only "migrated after an opportunity became available," which often resulted in finding jobs as domestics or as baby-sitters. Through this information and guidance single women were able to settle more quickly and adapt to their new environment. However their settlement and adaptation implied a certain degree of acculturation. Most of the women studied established themselves in ethnic enclaves and worked in isolated places where it would be difficult for their networks to expand beyond their kin and friend networks already in place. This stability prompted the settlement process for single women. In my sample ten of the eighteen women came to the home of a female relative or friend. For some of these women, however, the availability of work was not a motivating factor in their migration. Massey et al. wrote that "settled migration" is a result of integration. "Integration implies an ability to cope with U.S. language and customs, even if the migrant lives and works in a Mexican enclave." Hondagneu-Sotelo assures that single women's settlement, as well as men's settlement, can be achieved by simply finding the necessary resources to accommodate one's self in the host society.

In the end, family stage migration and single unit migration allowed the women in Hondagneu-Sotelo's sample to form social networks that assisted other women in their movement and settlement North. These viable networks promoted growth in all avenues of information and public assistance. For instance, churches and community organizations aided

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31 Sotelo, p. 96.
32 Massey et al. p. 179
these women in seeking out schools and public assistance for their children.\textsuperscript{33} This information was vital to the transition of these immigrants.

\textsuperscript{33} Sotelo, p. 162-172.
Chapter 2: Methodology

The methodology of this case study will primarily consist of two parts. First, I will draw upon the relevant literature on immigration and social networks to represent social network theories of migration.

The second part will entail qualitative information. Over a period of two months (mid-January - March) eighteen women allowed me to interview them. I conducted interviews in the Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan areas of the greater metropolitan Boston area using a snowball sampling method. Six of my respondents were the result of chain referrals in which one primary informant allowed me to interview a set of people with whom she was connected. The other twelve interviewees were enlisted from a social agency in Dorchester, *Mujeres Unidas En Acción* (Women United in Action), a social agency that provides services such as ESL, Pre-GED, GED, Adult basic education, and counseling to Hispanic women. This, of course, is not a representative sample for this group of people.

I conducted an in-depth case study of a small group of women from the three Boston neighborhood’s where a significant number of new Hispanic arrivals settle. I knew that I would be unable to do the same type of ethnographic research described in the previous section because of time and personal constraints (marriage and school). However, I began this thesis to understand the way in which immigrant Hispanic women find jobs, housing, and child care I will argue that my sample allows me to adequately explore these issues in the context of an ethnic-centered immigrant community.

Another part of my qualitative methodology was to outline the type of interviewees I would need to consider. For instance, the length of stay in the United States, marital status,
women with children, etc. I did not, however, place any restrictions on the kind of respondents I would seek. It would be difficult and time consuming to pre-screen potential respondents. I also felt that I was testing whether or not women have different means of support not whether married women have different experiences from single women, per se. I only made two distinctions – tenure in the community and migration purpose. As for tenure, I chose to define a recent immigrant as having been in the United States five years or less, while more established immigrants are six years and above.\textsuperscript{34} The migratory purpose deals with the migrant's intention while in the U.S. I am interested primarily in long-term residents or women who are recent immigrants but do not intend on returning to their home country (as opposed to sojourner migrants). I will consider sojourner types if the respondent has indicated that she plans on returning to the United States.

I conducted my interviews in Spanish and then transcribed them into English. Most of my questions were open-ended and were principally concerned with the decision to migrate, the role of family and friends in this effort, and family and friend's role while in the US. I also asked for more specific household information so that I could compare the experiences of the women interviewed (See Appendix 1 for a list of interviewing questions).

**Method of Gathering Data**

I must say that identifying potential respondents was quite difficult. At first I contacted social service agencies and asked if I could come to their offices and interview women who fit the profile I mentioned above. Only two responded positively. The rest were afraid for the

\textsuperscript{34} Other studies have noted that three years was a determinant of a recent immigrant (Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), Massey et al. (1987). Five years is the benchmark most often used in large-scale surveys of the population, like the U.S. Census.
confidentiality of their client (while I assured them that all conversations were going to be confidential) and were not sure that they could meet my criteria. Soon after these responses I changed my approach and asked if I could volunteer at the social agencies, meet some people, and then interview them on my own time. They didn’t like this idea either. Some of the times they would refer me to other agencies and say “they might be able to help you.” None of them did. As my frustration levels rose I wondered what I would do next. One day, I ran into one of my husband’s classmates whom I met once and he asked me how I was. I broke down and confessed my frustration. Immediately he told me of his roommate who works for an immigrants advocacy group as an attorney who had connections with many Hispanics in Boston. We went to dinner and discussed my dilemma. The next day she took me to her place of work and I spoke to the people in charge. They said that I could put up flyers and see what happened. I made flyers, but nothing happened. In passing she had mentioned a woman who works as a cleaning lady for her downstairs neighbor who she believed to be an immigrant from Santo Domingo. She gave me her number and I called and was able to set up my first interview. Soon after, through this one contact, I was able to access her network of five other people.

After that I thought that I needed to expand since I was only tapping into the Dominican community. I saw an advertisement for Mujeres Unidas en Acción and it mentioned that they served the female Hispanic population. I contacted the director of the Center. She was very friendly and helpful. She said that she did not have a problem with my interviewing her clients. She called me the next day and said that I should send a flyer and a sign up sheet. At first I thought, oh great another flyer that won’t produce anything, but then she called me the next day with a list of people who were interested in being part of my study. From there I was able to conduct another twelve interviews.
Sample

I interviewed eighteen Hispanic women in the Boston area. Of the eighteen women, five were from Puerto Rico, eleven were born in the Dominican Republic, one from Cuba, and one from Costa Rica. The greater Boston area is reported to have a Hispanic population of 59,692 of which 30,411 (50.9%) is female. And of the total Hispanic population, 42% (25,183) is Puerto Rican and 13.2% (7,938) is from the Dominican Republic. Therefore, my sampling was able to tap into these over represented Hispanic groups. The Census figures may be conservative given the influx of Dominicans during the 1990s. The women’s range in age was between eighteen and fifty-one years of age. Four women were between the ages of 18-25 (22%), six women between the ages of 26-35 (33%), six women between the ages of 36-45 (33%), and 2 women between the ages of 46-55 (11%). Most of my sample consisted of single women (10 of 18 or 55%). When compared to the city of Boston as a whole the number of single women is 21%. Five women in the sample were separated from their husbands (27%). When compared to the city of Boston, two percent of the female population is separated. Two of the eighteen women in my sample were married (11%) compared to twelve percent for the city.

35 Please recall that I refer to all of Boston, but my respondents primarily lived in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan.
36 Calculated from the STF3A files of the 1990 US Census.
37 Since Puerto Ricans are American Citizens, they are considered U.S. migrants versus foreign immigrants. New York city became a major focal point for Puerto Rican migration. Migration flows have varied by each decade. During the 1970s the recession caused a number of migration bursts; in the 1980s Puerto Rico became troubled by social problems including a rise in crime, overcrowding, and increased unemployment causing an influx of Puerto Ricans. I include Puerto Ricans in my research of Hispanic populations because, despite their citizenship status, are the most economically disadvantaged Latino group in the United States. (Source: Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America. (1995, vol. 2)).
38 The total number of Dominicans reported in the 1990 US Census is quite conservative. For that matter it has been suggested that close to 29,000 Dominicans reside in the State of Massachusetts. It is reported that no reliable figures on the number of undocumented immigrants in this country exist. This community is also predominantly urban, residing in Boston. (Source: Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America (1995, vol.1)).
40 The figures for the city of Boston given for the comparative framework (my sample versus the city of Boston) are based on the total population of Boston.
of Boston. And one divorced woman (5.5%) as compared to 3.5% in the city of Boston. Three of the women did not have children (16%) while the fourteen women who have children ranged in ages from 1 to 6 (See Appendix 2 for a breakdown of children per women). The average number of children was three. The number of people in these women’s household ranged from 1 to 9 (See Appendix 2 for a breakdown of people in household).

The women’s time of entry ranged from 1982 to 1997. Seven women (38%) entered the country between 1982 and 1986. For the city of Boston as a whole only 4% of the population entered during this time. Six women (33%) entered between 1987 and 1992. And, five women (27%) entered between 1993 and 1997.\textsuperscript{41} (See Appendix 2 for a breakdown of entry dates).

The education level of these women was mostly low. Six women (33.3%) have educational levels between 3\textsuperscript{rd} grade to 6\textsuperscript{th} grade (the elementary years), while six women (33.3%) had educational levels between the 7\textsuperscript{th} grade and 9\textsuperscript{th} grade (the junior high years). In comparison to the Hispanic population in Boston fourteen percent have educational levels of less than the 9\textsuperscript{th} grade. Two women (11%) had educational levels between 10\textsuperscript{th} grade and 12\textsuperscript{th} grade (high school); this coincides with the 11% for the Hispanic population of Boston. Lastly, four women (22%) had educational levels past high school ranging from 13 years of school to 16 years (non-degree) while only 6% of the Hispanic population in Boston has some college (See Appendix 2 for a breakdown of education levels).

The women’s employment status was also quite low. Only seven of the eighteen women currently worked (38%). This percentage of employed women is comparable to the population of Boston whose number of employed females is 35%. Of the eleven women currently

\textsuperscript{41} I can’t make any comparisons for the 1987-1992 and the 1993-1997 dates of entry because there isn’t any current information.
unemployed (61%), only one of them has ever held a job. The city of Boston reports that 18.2% of females do not work. The differences show the discrepancy of unemployed female workers in the city of Boston. Of those employed, two are live-in homecare providers, two more work in a day cleaning job, one works as a restaurant manager, another as an assistant secretary, and lastly, one as an executive director of a social agency in Boston (See Appendix 2 for a breakdown of women with or without employment).

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42 It should be noted that the number of women not employed might be a discrepancy in my sample and in my methodology. I not only interviewed women during the day, but also interviewed twelve women who were currently seeking assistance from a social service agency (ESL, Pre-GED, GED, and Adult Basic Education (ABE)).
Chapter 3: Immigration and Settlement

For many Hispanic immigrant groups the continuity of family organization is an essential aspect of the continuity of social networks and incorporation. “Research in diverse parts of the world has confirmed the significance of migrants’ social ties for neighborhood settlement patterns, psychological support, securing jobs, and maintaining links to the home communities.”

Massey et al. has pointed out that as “social networks expand and increase, the range and magnitude of the ‘social capital’ circulating within them broaden (e.g. access to loans, housing, and employment opportunities) and the social class composition of the migration stream diversifies”. Many labor economists and migration scholars have detailed the issue of settlement and immigrant populations and they have principally focused upon the patterns of immigrant Hispanic men. The settlement of immigrants, especially that of Hispanic women, has not been approached in any systematic manner by scholars. As a result of this, few have studied the role of social networks in the settlement choices of immigrant Hispanics to understand the impact of Hispanic settlement in various neighborhoods. What is to follow is an analysis of the settlement patterns of my respondents based upon their available social networks.

The initial settlement of my female interviewees, like their male counterparts, is in the home of a relative, or friend. Fifteen of the eighteen women I interviewed were able to stay with

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44 Massey et al., Return to Azlan: The Social Process of International Migration from Western Mexico 1987.
45 Between Two Islands, p.13.
Massey et. al Return to Azlan. To name a few of the authors who deal in depth with the issue of Hispanic male migrations.
48 Grasmuck and Pessar discusses the issue of Dominican women and their settlement patterns. (p.13)
kin or friends until they were able to settle on their own.\textsuperscript{49} This pattern of establishment would be expected since they all immigrated with the help of relatives or friends. For this reason this chapter is organized into two sections: Initial Settlement and Secondary Settlement\textsuperscript{50}.

Although the reasons for emigrating are too diverse to categorize, I arrived at four “ideal-types” for understanding these women’s initial settlement: family situation\textsuperscript{51}, sojourning\textsuperscript{52}, employment opportunities, family migration (movement with a spouse). Secondary Settlement (which sometimes involved the movement of more than one other time) involved the movement under two ideal-types: Family and Friends, and Social Service Agencies.

\textbf{Initial Settlement}

\textit{Family Situation}

Those who came either as a result of a familial problem at home or in an attempt to reunite with their families are grouped under this ideal-type. Three of my interviewees emigrated as a result of problems with their spouses. When Mirna,\textsuperscript{53} Estella, and Aracelis decided to emigrate from Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic it wasn’t because they had a job lined up or because the economic situation in her home country “pushed”

\textsuperscript{49}The three women (Milagros, Milagros N., and Kenya) do not fit this profile because two of the three Dominican women (Milagros and Milagros N.) married Puerto Rican men already living in Boston (so housing was not an issue). The third woman (Kenya) was married before she arrived and migrated with her husband. They were provided with an initial place to stay upon arrival through the help of the woman’s uncle’s wife. The two women named Milagros have not had to move since their arrival. Kenya has had to move because of her separation from her husband.

\textsuperscript{50}By Secondary settlement I do not imply that the second place of residence is less important than the first. On the contrary, I am showing how the social networks mitigated my respondents need to find their own place to stay.

\textsuperscript{51}By family situation I refer to the decision to migrate based upon incidences of violence and abuse in their home country, or the reunification of family members.

\textsuperscript{52}By sojourning I refer to the movement between the home country and the United states with the intent of remaining in the U.S.

\textsuperscript{53}Mirma: Interviewed on March 10, 1998 at the offices of \textit{Mujeres Unidas en Acción}. She came from Puerto Rico in 1988.
them out as many migration scholars tend to argue.\textsuperscript{54} Rather, their families helped them make the decision to come to the U.S. because of the problems they were having with their husbands. “My family [in the U.S.] helped me come to the United States,” Mirna told me, “when I told them I wanted to leave my husband. I came and stayed with my sister.” Estella said she left her husband after he became physically and emotionally abusive. “If things don’t suit you, get up and move...if there is a pattern beginning you have to break it. There was a pattern in my life and I had to chop it or else it will become an incurable cancer. Don’t let no man use you and abuse you!”\textsuperscript{55} Estella, upon her arrival, stayed with her sister and nephews in Boston.

Others came mainly to be reunified with their family members and they arrived at the homes of their family. Three women, Sonia, Ana, and Amelia, came at the request of their family members. Sonia migrated from Puerto Rico in 1985. When I asked her why she decided to come to the United States, she said, “I came to be with my family. My sister lived here and since my parents died in Puerto Rico I had no where else to go. I stayed with my sister when I arrived.”\textsuperscript{56} Amelia\textsuperscript{57} faced a similar situation. Amelia emigrated from Santo Domingo to Miami, Florida in 1982 to stay with her mother. A few years later her mother died in Miami and Amelia came to Boston in 1987 to be with her sister who had arrived in Boston in 1985. Ana D. emigrated from Santo Domingo to the United States in 1985 with her two brothers to the home of her mother. “My mother lived here since 1984 and asked for us to come.”\textsuperscript{58}

Lastly, one woman came as a result of wanting to be with her family. Ana B. came to the United States from Santo Domingo in 1984 with a tourist visa with the intention of relocating by overstaying her visa. She arrived in New York to the home of her cousins. After a year, she

\textsuperscript{54} Massey et al. 1988; Piore, 1979
\textsuperscript{55} Estella: Interviewed on February 15, 1998 at her place of work. She emigrated from Costa Rica in 1983.
\textsuperscript{56} Sonia: Interviewed on March 10, 1998 at the offices of \textit{Mujeres Unidas en Acción}.
\textsuperscript{57} Amelia: Interviewed on March 10, 1998 at the offices of \textit{Mujeres Unidas en Acción}.
moved to Massachusetts (Dorchester) and stayed with an aunt. After two years, she married a
Puerto Rican and moved into his apartment. All of these examples show the relative ease with
which immigrant women can mobilize with the help of their family networks. In the case of
Aracelis, we can even note one of the ways in which these networks are invoked. She explained
that she asked her cousin to reciprocate a favor she had done for him, by allowing her to stay
with him. “I came to where my cousin lived. He needed housing when I was in Puerto Rico so I
let him stay and so when I came here I needed housing and I stayed with him.”

Sojourning

Those who came to visit a family member or a friend with the intention of going back to
Puerto Rico, or to seek medical attention, or to intentionally have their child born in the States
are grouped under this ideal-type. Migration scholars have referred to sojourning ("temporary
migration") in the context of male labor movements (sometimes referred to as seasonal migration
since men would migrate when certain type of work became available) and/or for social reasons.
Migrants would make two or three trips, lasting between a year or less, at different points in their
lives. "These migrants are target earners who seek to make money quickly…before returning
home." Others came for social reasons (e.g. visit family members, help in the care of a sick
relative, attend school, study English, for adventure), like one of the three women I
interviewed. For sojourners, social networks are of obvious importance to their initial
settlement. Without these networks in place it is difficult to believe that these women would
want to or even be able to move back and forth with or without their children.

60 Massey et al., Return to Aztlan, p.176.
Carmen, who migrated from Puerto Rico in 1987 said, “I came to see my brother, I wanted a change, to see what the United States was like. I stayed with my brother until I found a place of my own.” Carmen, however, went back to Puerto Rico and stayed there for a year leaving her children behind with her brother. “I came back because I didn’t like it…my children were here. But, I’m going back in a couple of months.”

Another woman, Maide, emigrated from Santo Domingo to New York in 1994 to be with her father who had filled out the necessary paperwork for her arrival. She stayed in New York with her father for a year and then returned to Santo Domingo and stayed for two years until she got pregnant. Maide says, “I came back to the States so that my child would be born here.” In 1997, instead of arriving in New York with her father she came to Boston to the home of her “family-like” friends.

Yadira migrated from Puerto Rico to the United States in 1997 seeking specialized medical care for her disability. Her move is temporary and may not result in a return migration unless her medical treatment mandates it. “I came for my medical treatment and I will be returning to Puerto Rico as soon as it is over.” Yadira initially stayed with her grandmother until her cousin found her a room in a home with a family friend.

Carmen R. migrated to the mainland from Puerto Rico in 1987. She came alone to the home of a close friend. Carmen said, “since we can come in and out of Puerto Rico I chose to do it my own – most people come because of family, I came to be with my friend.” Carmen R.’s statement is, of course, indicative of an important aspect of the experiences of Hispanic

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61 Massey et al., p. 176.
62 Interview with Carmen V. on March 10, 1998 at the offices of Mujeres Unidas en Acción.
63 Maide: Interviewed on March 10, 1998 at the offices of Mujeres Unidas en Acción.
64 Yadira: Interviewed on March 10, 1998 at the offices of Mujeres Unidas en Acción.
immigrants in the Northeast, for this is where Puerto Ricans usually make their settlement. The relative ease with which Puerto Rican’s can enter and leave the United States, make social networks and their maintenance all the more significant.

Marriage

Those who came as a result of a marriage are grouped under this ideal-type. There was a correlation between the reasons for migrating to the United States and where these women settled. Two of the three women in this category came as a result of their husband’s search for work. One woman followed her husband after a year when he was able to find steady employment while the other came directly with him. The third woman married a Puerto Rican and stayed in Santo Domingo until he arranged the paperwork for her to come to Boston.

Milagros N. emigrated to the United States in 1989 from Santo Domingo. Her husband had come to the US in 1988 in search of steady employment. After a year he sent for his wife and their one child to come live with him in Roxbury, MA. Her husband came to live with his cousin initially and then found an apartment for them in the same building as his cousin.

In 1989, Kenya and her husband emigrated from Santo Domingo to New York. They arrived in New York to the home of her husband’s cousin who told him of a job as a mechanic. Their stay in New York was cut short when Kenya complained to her husband about missing her family that was in Massachusetts. Kenya has her sister, brother, and uncle and aunt living in Boston. They moved to Boston in 1991 when Kenya’s uncle found her husband a job working for a cleaning company. “We arrived to an apartment that my uncle’s wife found for us.”

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65 The current number of Puerto Ricans in the United States is 2.7 million, while 1.1 to 1.5 million live in the Northeast. These figures are based upon the 1990 U.S. Census Bureau of Statistics.
Milagros has no family in the United States, but emigrated from Santo Domingo to the United States in 1993 after an unusual courting with her now husband, a Puerto Rican. A neighbor of Milagros' in Santo Domingo had emigrated to the United States and carried a picture of her with him. One day, her neighbor meets a man at the Laundromat and shows her picture to him. The stranger fell in love with the girl in the picture and asked if he could meet her. The neighbor told him that she lived in Santo Domingo. He asked if he could have her phone number so that he could call her with her permission. Milagros said, "I wasn't going to give my phone number to some man my friend just met in the Laundromat." After a few weeks of persistent inquiries by her friend she finally agreed and they spoke on the phone for hours. After two months of a long distance relationship he went to meet her in Santo Domingo. He stayed for two months total, but after 6 weeks asked her to marry him. The following week they were married and he came back to the States to do all of the necessary paperwork for her to come to the States. Milagros' initial settlement was the home of her now husband.

Employment Opportunities

The fourth ideal-type are those who come to the United States for a better life and to find employment. Seventeen of the eighteen women said at one point that they were coming to find a better life (which included family reunification), however, only one woman mentioned coming for a job.

Marcia B. arrived from Santo Domingo in 1995 to find work since she had been unsuccessful at finding steady employment in the Dominican Republic and to be with a family.

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60 Milagros: Interviewed on February 22, 1998 over the phone.
member. "I stayed with my sister when I came from Santo Domingo and was informed by my sister’s husband of a cleaning job and taking care of two children."\textsuperscript{67}

**Two-Fold Social Network Migration**

On the one hand, the networks helped these immigrant women with their initial settlement. On the other, the established social networks used their newly arrived networks in order to meet their daily needs. This happened to one of my respondents, Elena. One of the married respondents needed someone to take care of their children while she and her husband went to work. Their cousin told them that a family friend has a daughter that could help them out, but that she lives in Santo Domingo. The husband of my respondent went to Santo Domingo and got a visa for the young woman, Elena, to come and stay with them and care for their four young children.\textsuperscript{68} Elena’s initial settlement is unique to that of my sample. She did not come to stay with family or friends, rather with her employer who was her cousin’s friend—an extended network.

**Secondary Settlement and Social Networks**

Although kinship- and friend-based networks facilitate the initial stage of migration, the scarcity of resources in particular ethnic communities and variations in the local economy place a great strain upon networks over time. Consequently, the initial place of residence is mostly viewed as a temporary arrangement. Only four of my interviewees still live in the initial place of residence; three of these had been in the United States less than five years. The women who

\textsuperscript{67} Marcia B.: Interviewed on February 8, 1998 in the home of her employer (where Marcia currently resides).
currently reside in their initial place of residence did not feel that they had overstayed their welcome, nor did they feel financially prepared to move on their own. For those who do move out, however, networks are an important source of social capital. The profit gained from this social capital is information about affordable housing and financial assistance, which drastically decreases the cost of migration to the United States.\(^{69}\)

Out of the fourteen interviewees who had moved out of their initial place of residence, ten found their secondary place of residence through information provided by friends and family members. Two went through institutional networks, such as social agencies like the Boston Housing Authority, Martha Eliot Health Center, Mujeres Unidas En Acción, and the Cardinal Cushing Center. One woman found housing on her own by simply walking past a “For Rent” sign.

Social Networks—Family and Friends

Of the ten women who found their secondary residence through a family member or friend, three have continued to live in the secondary residence. After two years of living in her initial residence, the friend with whom Carmen was living with told her where to find an affordable apartment. She was able to find one quickly and has lived on her own in the same place for nine years.

Enya emigrated from Cuba to the United States in 1984 and initially stayed with her father in Miami and then moved to Boston. In 1990 she moved out when friends told her of the availability of an affordable condominium. Her father helped her with the financing, and she has lived there ever since.

\(^{68}\) Elena: Interviewed on February 8, 1998 at the home of employment and residence.
Yadira came from Puerto Rico in June of 1997 for medical treatment. She moved in with her grandmother initially, and after a month her cousin told her about a room in the house of her cousin’s friend that was available for rent.

Two other women had used their family to initially settle, got married and moved in with their new husbands. When they separated from their husbands they moved in either with their initial network or found an apartment through the help of their networks. Amelia had initially stayed with her sister, but moved out when she got married. She and her husband left for Hartford, Connecticut and then to New York in search for work. After their divorce, Amelia came back to Boston to stay with her sister. After she returned to Boston, a friend who had applied for public housing told her to apply at the Boston Housing Authority (BHA), and she was able to obtain housing through them.

Even when social networks are not directly responsible for immigrants’ gaining their second place of residence, the time spent in the United States with these networks allows them to learn about the various means of finding housing. The woman who found her apartment by noting a “For Rent” sign in the street is an example of this for her network was able to inform her of the possibilities of noting a place of residence. Estella is yet another example. She worked as a live-in domestic and moved in with her employer after initially staying with her sister. She, however, was forced to move out on her own when her employer laid her off. When asked how she found housing she said, “After a few years you learn the system and you work with it.” Estella is now the Executive Director of an immigrant’s worker’s rights agency.

Ana experienced a similar situation. She initially came to live with her mother. After two years, she moved in with her grandmother. Another three years passed before she moved into the home of her boyfriend’s mother. In 1991, as a result of bad relations between her

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69 Massey, p. 317.
boyfriend and his mother, she decided to move out on her own. Ana’s mother had moved back to Santo Domingo and her grandmother had died, so she could not return to her initial two residences. She stayed with her boyfriends’ mother until she was able to find an apartment. When questioned how she found an apartment, she responded by stating “through the newspaper.” Ana was the only person I interviewed who used the newspaper to find herself an apartment. I asked her why she chose to use the newspaper. Her response revealed the degree to which, through her networks, she was able to learn about the different resources available to her in the United States to locate affordable housing.

No one helped me... I tried. I would call and call the Boston Housing Authority and no one would help me. I filled out an application but nothing resulted. I was able to find an apartment through the newspapers... it takes five years to get housing through the government. I knew that there was an apartment section in the newspaper. I was able to find an apartment that I could afford.71

I asked whether her brother or sister, who came when she did, were able to help her. She said, “they have families of their own now.” Ana’s obvious disappointment with the lack of assistance received from institutional networks forced her to find housing on her own.

_Institutional Networks--Social Service Agencies_

Often family or friend networks guide the new immigrant to social service agencies, but for some women the social service agencies are the primary link in the chain of networks used to find housing. Two of my interviewees had no family or friend(s) available to them for their secondary settlement. To these women social service agencies were deemed invaluable.

Aracelis left the Dominican Republic for Puerto Rico. There she married a Puerto Rican who later abused her physically. Her legal immigrant status attained through this marriage,

70 Interview with Ana D. on March 10, 1998 at the offices of _Mujeres Unidas en Acción_.


however, allowed her to leave her abusive husband and move to the United States. She initially stayed with her cousin and his wife. After a short period of time, her cousin began to sexually abuse her. She repeatedly tried to fight his advances and was ultimately thrown out onto the street for refusing to be his mistress. Her experience I feel is unique to my sample. Other studies did not note the notion that networks can also be a liability to the immigrant.  

Aracelis had no family in this country except the child she carried in her arms and the one in her womb from her marriage. Not knowing where to turn, she went to the welfare office. She stated that she became aware of such services during her stay in Puerto Rico. The welfare office put her up in a hotel until there was room in a nearby shelter. During her stay at the shelter, she was told to apply for public housing. She managed to get public housing, but was ultimately kicked out because of a “tragedy” that occurred. (She seemed reluctant to discuss this tragedy so I did not push her to explain in order not to jeopardize the rapport I had established.) She then returned to the shelter and reapplied for housing and was able to obtain an apartment in Roxbury. When I asked her how she thinks other immigrants come to the U.S., she replied, “many people come because of family or illegally, but my experience was different--I didn’t have family.”

Mirna represents a slightly different immigration experience. She initially stayed with her sister when she migrated from Puerto Rico. When she placed her children in school, they referred her to the Martha Eliot Health Center as a source of affordable health care for her and her children. At the health center she was told that she should apply with the Boston Housing Authority for public housing.

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71 Interview with Ana D. on March 10, 1998.
72 Carol Stack’s All our Kin offers the notion of reciprocity. She describes a poor woman providing childcare for her neighbor. She waits for the time when she can “cash in” her favor (reciprocity). This shows how networks may overburden poor families.
73 Interview with Aracelis C. on March 10, 1998.
Conclusion

Even though settlement processes of immigrants are too diverse to lend themselves to easy categorization, four ideal types represented the initial settlements of my particular respondents: family, sojourning, marriage, and employment. Regardless of which of these they belonged to social networks were extremely crucial for their initial settlement. All came to reside with a network. The ideal types however illustrate a significant difference in my respondents’ experiences than those generally presumed of male immigrants and female immigrants that migrate with their husbands. They didn’t come for work necessarily. They came to be reunified with family or to escape an abusive relationship, primarily. As for the secondary settlement, the networks were crucial but not as crucial as first. Ten found their secondary place of residence through information provided by their social network. One found a place on her own while two used a social agency to search for housing.
Chapter 4: Employment and ChildCare

The general wisdom attained from studies of Hispanics’ migration to the United States suggests that employment is the primary reason for migration. As previously explained, such works cite various push-pull factors that lead to migration. They note that these immigrants are made up of poor, uneducated males coming as either temporary workers (sojourners)\textsuperscript{74} or target earners.\textsuperscript{75} This same conventional wisdom has led to a number of studies on the labor dynamics and social networks of male Hispanics. It was not until recently that female Hispanics were given a place in studies on immigration and social network.\textsuperscript{76} They have shown that women’s social networks played an important role in their husband’s attainment of work or that they come to join their network in order to assist in labor, domestic services and child rearing. But, they have also offered some new insight into the migration processes, illustrating that Hispanic immigration is multifaceted. The most significant of these new findings is that the migration of a large number of Hispanic women, particularly single migrants, is not directly related to employment. Rather, it is motivated by a desire to reunite with their families.\textsuperscript{77}

Although this chapter is dedicated to the study of the role of social networks in Hispanic migrants’ attainment of employment, this last point is extremely crucial. For it helps explain the fact that only seven out of my eighteen interviewees were currently employed (38%) and only eight had ever held a job in the United States (44%). It should also be noted that these individuals were not barred from working by a spouse or a family member. Only one out of the

\textsuperscript{74} Temporary workers, sometimes referred to as sojourners, are defined as those coming to work temporarily to make some money quickly so as to either send remittances home or to return with some cash in hand. They tend to migrate back and forth between the US and their home countries. (Piore, 1979; Massey et al., 1984; Portes and Bach, 1985)

\textsuperscript{75} Target earners are those who come for a short period of time in order to make a certain amount of money only to return to their home country. (Massey et al., 1984).

\textsuperscript{76} Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. \textit{Gendered Transitions}. 1994.
ten women who never worked said that she did not pursue employment because her husband did not want her to work.

As seen in the previous chapter, most of my interviewees came to the United States in order to reunify with their families or to escape abusive relationships. Few expected their social networks to provide them with access to employment upon arrival, and only one came to the United States with a job already lined up for her.

It should not be concluded from the above, however, that female Hispanic immigrants are not willing to work and that they are a sort of parasite, drawing their livelihood from various social programs. On the contrary, what I hope to illustrate in this chapter is that those female Hispanic immigrants who are employed are so because of the strength of their social networks, and those who are not are often barred from attaining employment as a result of their weak networks. And there are no institutional networks in place that could assist them with the resources needed, such as child care, for them to be able to work. Furthermore, I will argue that the nature of jobs often attained by female Hispanic immigrants, such as domestic jobs, isolate and weaken their network ties, thus further weakening the network ties of the Hispanic migrant community.  

Social Networks and Employment

Out of my seven employed interviewees, six (85%) obtained their jobs through personal social networks. This percentage is by no means unique to the geographical location and the nationalities that I have chosen to study. Many similar studies of migrant women corroborate

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78 For an excellent illustration of this point, see Hagan, 1998. The author presents a dynamic model of networks and immigrant incorporation by sex.
this finding. Mary Romero, for example, in her study of Chicanas in Denver states, “To acquire most of these jobs, the women relied on word of mouth. Information on job openings was obtained from husbands, sisters, cousins, friends, and neighbors.”79 Two of my respondents are live-in domestics and are recent immigrants. Two are currently working for cleaning service and are more established immigrants. Three are more skilled laborers and have been more established in the United States (see Table 2.1 for a breakdown of employed women). They work as an assistant secretary, a restaurant manager, and executive director of a immigrant laborers’ right organization. The average education level is 10.5 years (range is between 3rd grade and 16 years of school –see table for a breakdown of educational levels).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Date of Entry</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Levels of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Cleaning</td>
<td>9th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana V.</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Assistant Secretary</td>
<td>16 years*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enya</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Restaurant Manager</td>
<td>12th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milagros N.</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Cleaning</td>
<td>16 years*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estella</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>12th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Live-in homecare provider</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcia B.</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Live-in homecare provider</td>
<td>6th grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* They have been in school on and off for this number of years. They do not, however, have a terminal degree.

Unskilled Laborers

The two women who are currently working as live-in domestics, Marcia B. and Elena, are both from Santo Domingo and migrated to the United States in 1995 and 1996, respectively. Elena came to the United States with the intent of working upon arrival while Marcia came to see her sister and consequently was notified of a job. They both, however, were told of their current positions through their personal networks. Her sister’s husband who knew her employer

from having patronized her business informed Marcia. He mentioned to her that Marcia had recently come to the United States and was looking for work. Marcia B. currently resides with her "patrona" (boss) and her two children, assisting with cleaning and childcare. Elena, on the other hand, had come at the request of her cousin's friend with the intent of living with her employer.

Out of the two women working for cleaning service companies, only one found her job through a personal social network. Amelia found out about working for a cleaning service through her friend. Milagros N., however, said that she applied directly to a cleaning service and was offered the job. Milagros N. was able to find a job on her own because she has had sixteen years of education and has lived in the United States since 1989. These factors translated into a level of confidence and familiarity with the structures in place for the attainment of employment that assisted her in finding a job. Her level of confidence and articulateness was also evident during our interview.

Any attempt to understand the settlement processes of Hispanic migrants, particularly with respect to employment, cannot simply stop at inquiring how employment is attained. Rather, we must also consider what sort of structures are available for social and geographical mobility. Does the migrant have a means of advancing in her career? Would she be able to find a job if she moved away from the region of her primary settlement and her networks there?

As studies of skilled laborers have shown and as we shall see in the next section of this chapter, skilled laborers just as unskilled laborers most often find their employment through their social networks. Consequently, individuals' social and geographical mobility is often limited by the scope of their social networks or, in other words, the number of different people with

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80 Mark Granovetter in *Getting a Job* noted that men in professional types of jobs easily move into these positions through networks that are defined as "weak ties," that is networks outside of their family and personal friends.
whom they are able to interact. Among female Hispanic migrants, the consequences of limited social networks manifest themselves in the form occupational segregation and the weakening of social networks.

Occupational segregation is best explained by a number of authors. Occupational segregation is to a large degree defined as men and women employed in different jobs in the workplace, which many believe is the result of labor market discrimination against women. In my study, the presence of occupational segregation was not salient, for the number of interviewees who actually worked was very small. Nonetheless, hints of occupational segregation were evident in Milagros N.'s employment experience. Struck by her confident and articulate responses, I asked her whether or not she was looking for a better job. She replied, "My English is not very good so I have to rely on getting work through people who know Spanish at the jobs. The cleaning business has a lot of Hispanic women working there. We all speak the same language." Another interviewee who was not working because she had to take care of her children complained that all the jobs that have ever been brought to her attention by her family and friends have been in domestic labor. She, however, states, "I would like to work in an office and answer phones, but only if they have an answering service in Spanish since I won't be able to understand what they say." Of course, the situations of both Milagros N. and this unemployed interviewee's comments are primarily indicative of how language skills are crucial to social mobility, but they also illustrate the fact that social networks often bind one to a particular community and the occupations practiced by that community. For, in the case of both of these women, nothing, except their social networks and the relative ease with which they can

81 Francine Blau and Wallace E. Hendricks (1979); Denise Segura (1994); Mary C. King (1992); Barbara Bergmann (1974); Randy Albelda (1986).
82 Interview with Aracelis on March 10, 1998 at Mujeres Unidas en Accion.
interact with them, is keeping them from interacting with the non-Hispanic community in order to learn more English and to improve their occupational status.

The weakening of social networks are primarily noted among the female domestic laborers. As Jacqueline Hagan explains, working as live-in domestics, immigrant women experience diminishing social network and become isolated from other modes of social capital. She writes, “Unable to maintain horizontal links with other coethnics and nonethnics, the women become increasingly dependent on and controlled by their patronas (female bosses). This situation leads to the breakdown of ethnic-based networks and the eventual isolation...the women typically work alone from Monday through Saturday in the employer’s households. Only one day is left to reestablish community ties through neighborhood and religious activities.” (Hagan, p.61)

It should be noted that the frequent interaction of live-in domestics with the family and friends of their employers does not lead to the formation of new social networks. I did not inquire into the reasons for this in my study but I am not aware of any studies that examine the possibility that live-in domestics do not form new social networks with their employers because of classism and racism. 83

**Skilled Laborers**

The three workers in more skilled positions all obtained their jobs through their personal social networks. Ana V. got a job as an assistant secretary through her aunt who had been working there for twelve years. When asked how she obtained her current job, she said, “They just called me from where my aunt worked and asked if I wanted a job...My aunt was retiring

83 Mary Romero. *Maid in the USA.*
and she recommended me for the job.” This connection was absolutely crucial to Ana’s attainment of a job. Despite her sixteen years of education, she was unable to find a job on her own. She mentioned that her ex-husband had not allowed her to work. So, she had stayed at home caring for her two children. It is difficult to imagine how Ana could have been able to work in such a position without the help of her aunt, especially with no prior work experience in the United States.

Estella who is gainfully employed as an executive director of an immigrant rights agency attained her job through a friend she had met in an English as Second Language (ESL) class about ten years ago. Just last year, she called Estella when the agency needed someone to hire as an office assistant. She worked for them for a year and was promoted to the position of Executive Director. (As a matter of fact, she received her promotion the day before our interview in March!)

Enya’s situation is different, but nonetheless indicative of the significance of social networks in one’s occupational path. Her father owns a restaurant, and he has employed her as its manager.

*Unemployed Women and Their Social Networks: Barriers to Employment*

Earlier I argued the fact that many female Hispanic migrants do not come to the United States to work and do not work when in the United States does not mean that they do not want to work. Of the eleven unemployed women interviewed, only two were not at all concerned about obtaining a job. The remaining nine interviewees all expressed a desire to work, and eight of
them indicated that they were taking ESL and/or pre-GED\textsuperscript{84} classes in order to enhance their skills so that they may find work. It should also be noted that the two women who were not concerned about finding a job were in actuality not in a position to actively seek work. One of them is currently receiving benefits from her Social Security Insurance due to her medical condition. She actually migrated to the United States to receive medical care. The other has a disabled child. She stated, “My husband does not want me to work because he doesn’t want our child to be a burden on anyone...because of his disability.” Since the situation of these two women is unique to my sample, I will no longer refer to them in my discussion of barriers to employment.

On the contrary, these women are unemployed for they face a number of barriers to employment. As one would expect, none of my interviewees indicated that they do not work because they do not have any networks that would be able to find them a job, and it would be virtually impossible to measure the degree to which networks are not effective in providing access to jobs for individuals. The place where one can, however, gauge the significance of networks in attaining employment is to see the degree to which individuals could rely on their networks to remove some of the barriers that stand in their way to employment.

Unavailability of regular childcare, limited English skills, lack of inexpensive transportation, and limited education were mentioned as barriers to employment. With respect to education, as seen in Table 2.2 and Table 2.3, the average number of years the unemployed women spent in school is significantly less than those who were gainfully employed.

\textsuperscript{84} Pre-GED is a category that was developed by many social service agencies that indicates that the client is not ready for the advanced training for the General Education Degree (GED). They need to work on the basic skills
The networks of these unemployed women, however, were helpful in assisting them in improving their general education and English skills. All but one of the eight women who were in ESL and/or pre-GED classes were referred to these programs by their personal networks.

In general, however, education attainment, adequate English skill level and access to transportation were not the primary reasons why these women were unemployed. The primary

before they can move into the more advanced features of the GED.
barrier to employment, all of my unemployed interviewees agreed, was lack of adequate childcare provisions. Mothers, who are the primary caretakers of children, often find it very difficult to find a job given that in order for them to even begin looking for a job, they must tap into their social networks for childcare. And, one must have strong, unemployed social network ties in order to be able to rely on networks for regular childcare support. Despite the presence of such strong networks, however, at times jobs are available for shifts when one cannot even expect to rely on networks for regular childcare: “Where my brother works they need someone at night, but I can’t do it at night because of my kids.”

One of my unemployed interviewees actually provided childcare for her networks within her household. This is a significant way in which the migration experience of male and female Hispanics differ. As stated in the previous chapter under the rubric of two-fold social network migration, some female Hispanics migrate to the United States in order to provide childcare for their families of friends in this country.

In contrast to these unemployed women, three out of the seven employed women had no children. Out of the four women with children, two had live-in homecare providers while the other two used their social networks in order to help with the caring of their children. In Amelia’s case, the only reason why she was able to work was because of the extensive networks she was able to use for childcare: “Sometimes I have my sister take care of the two younger children [a four- and a one-year old], and other times, the father’s sisters take care of them. My older kids also help sometimes.”

Given the significance of childcare for attaining employment, I sought to gauge whether or not my interviewees did not want to burden their networks with their children or whether they actually did not have any network available to them for childcare. Hence, I asked them two
probing questions: Who takes care of your children when you have an errand to run? Who takes care of your children in case of an emergency? Five (27%) of the unemployed women responded to the first question by stating, “No one! I take them with me.” And, two of these said that even in case of an emergency they do not have anyone with whom they could leave their children.

**Conclusion**

This chapter explored the significance of personal social networks in the obtainment of employment and childcare. Eleven of my respondents were not employed while those who were employed found their job through networks. Of those who were not employed they faced obstacles that prevented their obtainment of employment. Childcare was identified as a significant obstacle in finding work. These women needed their social networks to take care of the children or find someone to care for them. Those who do work either did not have this obstacle (childless) or have a network that takes care of their children for them. However, my study suggests that one needs strong, *unemployed* social network ties in order to be able to rely on networks for regular childcare support. Even though only seven of the eighteen respondents were employed at the time of this study, six obtained their employment through their personal network. The personal networks served as an important aid in finding work and in removing the obstacles that stood in the way of individuals’ obtainment of employment, such as childcare.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

The goal of this study was to examine the significance of social networks in the immigration of female Hispanic migrants to the Boston region. Such an examination is a crucial but often neglected aspect of the Hispanic migration experience. Generally, our understanding of Hispanic migration to the United States has been informed by studies of the male migrants who come here to find work due to the poor economic conditions in their country of origin. Female migrants were believed to accompany and to assist these males in their endeavors. This study, however, by focusing on the role of networks in the lives of female Hispanic migrants seems to affirm the findings of some of the new scholarship on female Hispanic migrants⁸⁵, in which distinct aspects of the female migration experience are brought to the forefront.

I have found that just as in the case of men’s migration, social networks are an indispensable aspect of women’s migration and settlement. Social networks provide assistance with initial settlement and subsequent settlements as migrants become prepared to move out on their own. They are also an important aid in finding work and in removing the obstacles that stand in the way of individuals’ attainment of employment, such as childcare. On the other hand, I found that those who did not have an extensive social network had a more difficult time getting settled, finding jobs, and obtaining childcare. Given this important role of social networks among Hispanic migrants, the study of networks provides us with a great window into the migratory experience of female Hispanics.

To begin with, findings from my sample suggest that female Hispanic migrants, unlike their male counterparts, often do not come to this country in search of a job. The majority of my interviewees used their networks in order to reunite with their families or to escape abusive
spouses. As a matter of fact, most of my interviewees were unemployed. A significant number of them had never worked, and almost all of them received support for welfare programs or Social Security Insurance.

As I argued earlier, however, the fact that these women are unemployed does not mean that they do not wish to work. The popular notion that Hispanic migrants who do not work in the United States come here to find work but instead end up on welfare, becoming an economic burden to the state, I believe, results from migration studies mentioned, which focus exclusively on male Hispanics. From this preliminary study, it appears as though, in the settlement processes of female Hispanics, obtaining employment plays a complementary role to their primary objective of starting a new life. I found that several barriers stood in the way these unemployed women’s path to employment. Many of them did not have the educational and linguistic skills necessary to find employment, but more importantly all them did not have a means of finding childcare while they work. Hence, they could not even begin to look for a job. Conversely, those who were employed either did not have children or were able to use their networks or hire an employee for childcare.

Lack of childcare was not actually the problem of my interviewees alone. For as evident by my one interviewee who came to the United States to help a family friend by taking care of their children, the larger community as whole seem to be struggling to deal with this issue. The resource to which they turn for such support is usually their social networks, for most do not earn enough income to be able to support themselves and at the same time pay for childcare.

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85 Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994); Grasmuck and Pessar.
87 As seen in the study of poor African Americans in Carol Stack’s All our Kin. She notes that poor women use their networks as an investment in future ‘cash-ins’.
It should also be noted that since the majority of these women did not come to the United States to find employment, their social networks who assisted them in the settlement processes were often not in a position to help them attain employment. The fact that they migrated despite their barriers to employment further illustrates that in moving to the United States they primarily sought to start a new life rather than to find a job to make money. Employment greatly complemented or assisted in the fulfillment of this goal but was not the goal itself.

Although I have not discussed issues of public policy throughout this study, studies such as mine offer a great deal of insight into ways in which policies are translated into people’s everyday lives. Therefore, I would like to conclude by examining some of the public policy implications of this study. I think this discussion is particularly important given that a significant number of my interviewees were on welfare and that welfare in recent years has come under close scrutiny. Again, welfare policies that operate on the assumption that people should be working in order to earn their keep and that those who do not work take advantage of the system are often based on the expectations of men. Ironically, however, women are the primary beneficiaries of welfare policies. I believe this is why policy makers feel comfortable limiting welfare terms before having solved the problem of inadequate childcare. Even though lack of childcare seems to be the most prominent obstacle in women’s path to employment as well as the lack of educational skills and work histories.

The consequences of the welfare term-limit, of course, has not yet been felt by our communities, for the first group of women are not scheduled to come off of welfare until December of 1998. The effect of policy decisions that are out of touch with the day-to-day workings of people’s lives, however, can be noted in the current public housing cutbacks in
Boston. The decrease in financial support from public housing disconnects social network ties, which as we have seen are crucial to immigrant women’s settlement and job attainement.

Even if they were able to find employment, they will not be able to rely on networks for childcare, and given their low skill level, they will not be able to find jobs that will allow them to both support themselves and their children and pay for child care. Housing, employment, and childcare are interdependent factors in the settlement processes of immigrant women. This fact, however, is often not recognized by policy makers.
Bibliography


Appendix

Appendix 1a: Spanish Interviewing Questions

Decision de emigrar, Duración y establecimiento

¿En que año llegó usted a los EE.UU.? ¿Vino directamente a Massachusetts?
¿Vino usted sola o acompañada? (si vino acompañada, quien le acompañó?)
¿Por qué decidió usted venir a los Estados Unidos?
¿Ha tenido que mudarse muchas veces después de llegar a los EE.UU.?

Historial de trabajo

¿Ha trabajado desde que llegó a los EE.UU.? ¿Qué tipo de trabajos ha desempeñado? ¿Cómo encontró usted estos trabajos?
¿Ha usado usted alguna organización social para encontrar información acerca de empleo, servicios de salud, cuidado del niño, vivienda, etc?
¿Qué tipo de agencia social le gustaría ver?

Cuidado del niño

Pregunta si ellos han indicado que ellos tienen niños.
¿Quién cuida a sus niños cuando usted va trabajar o ejecutar mandados?
   ¿Esposo?
   ¿Parientes?
   ¿Amigos?
¿Si tuvo un emergencia en los últimos seis meses quien le cuidó a sus niños?
¿Asisten sus niños a un guardería de niños?

Vivienda

¿Cómo ha encontrado usted un apartamento? Casa?
¿Ha usado usted un servicio de encontrar un apartamento o casa?
Preguntas generales

¿En qué año nació usted?

¿Dónde nació usted?

¿Dónde nació su madre? ¿Su padre? ¿Dónde viven ellos ahora?

¿Cuál es su nacionalidad?

¿Tiene usted algún niño?

¿Cuántos?
¿Son ellos muchachos o muchachas?
¿Qué edad tienen ellos?

¿Cuántos niños viven con usted?

¿Es usted casada? ¿Separada? ¿Divorciada? ¿Soltera?

¿Vive usted con alguien (parientes, amigos)?

¿Cuántas personas viven donde usted vive?

¿Qué nivel de educación completó usted en su país?

¿Se ha matriculado o inscrito usted en un programa educativo en los Estados Unidos?

Si contesta si, que organización?

Appendix 1b: English Version of Interviewing Questions

A. Immigration Status

A.1. In what year did you come to the United States? Did you come directly to MA? (If not MA, then what brought you to MA?)

A.2. Did you come alone or with family? (which family members?)

B. Decision to Emigrate

B.1. Why did you decide to immigrate to the United States?

Family?
Friends?
Work?

B.2. (If applicable) Why did you come to MA?

B.3. Did you live in another part of the US before coming to Massachusetts?

D. Household composition and family background

D.1. What year were you born in?
D.2. Where were you born?

D.3. Where was your mother born? Your father? Where do they live now?
D.4. What is your nationality?
D.5. Do you have any children? (If no skip to D.7.)
   How many?
   Are they boys or girls?
   How old are they?
D.6. How many children live with you?
D.7. Have you ever been married?

D.8. Who do you live with?
   (if lives with relatives or friends ask why?)

D.9. How many people live in your home or where you live?

E. Education

E.1. What level of education did you complete in your home country?

E.2. Are you currently enrolled in an educational program? If so, what?

F. Job Status

F.1. Do you currently have a job? If so, where and what do you do? How long have you been working there?

F.2. How did you get your job? Newspaper, friend, relative, etc?
F.3 Have you ever used neighborhood employment agencies to help you find a job?

F.4. Are there any organizations that you feel comfortable talking to about concerns you have?

F.3. (Ask only if I get permission to ask very personal questions) How much are they paying you? Do you receive any benefits? Do you do work that pays you under the table (domestic, etc.)?

G. Child Care

Ask if they have indicated that they have children.

G.1. Who takes care of your children when you go to work or to run errands?
   Spouse?
   Relatives?
   Friends?

G.2. In the past six months, who have you relied upon to watch your kids while you had an emergency?

G.3. Do your kids attend any formal daycare?

H. Housing

H.1. Do you live in an apt. or house?

H.2. How did you find out about this apt? House?
## Appendix 3: Background Information on my Respondents

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>No. of Children</th>
<th>No. in Household</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
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