Also from Celia Jaes Falicov

Family Transitions:
Continuity and Change over the Life Cycle
Celia Jaes Falicov, Editor

LATINO FAMILIES IN THERAPY

SECOND EDITION

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CHAPTER 10

The Persistence of Extended Kin

Feeling rich when they enjoy a joke with friends and family at their sides.

—JIMMY SANTIAGO BACA, describing many ignominies suffered by Mexican migrant workers (2009, p. 72)[1]

Entre los parientes y el sol, cuánto más lejos mejor.

Just as it is best to keep distance from the sun, so it is the case with one's relatives.

—MEXICAN PROVERB (my translation)

Latino ethnic narratives invariably emphasize family in terms of inclusiveness and interdependence. In family systems terms, family connectedness—the obligation to care and support one another—is a defining feature of extended family life. This cultural tendency toward family connectedness seems to withstand migration and persist in some form for at least one or two or more generations. It has become an almost uncontested truism among social scientists and practitioners to assert that the basic social and emotional unit of Latino culture is the extended family, although in reality there are national, regional, and personal variations to this widespread phenomenon. It can also be a somewhat less consistent feature in second-generation adults, and of course, there is always the individual family history that defies the stereotype.

The physical and psychological presence of extended family is a common theme in many novels written by Latin Americans and Latinos in the U.S. Latino young authors often write about their own extended family life and the powerful impact the various members have had on their growing up. Descriptions of the traditional arrangements stress *la gran familia*, a large group that comprises three or four generations of

relatives, including vertical relationships of parents, grandparents, uncles, and great aunts as well as horizontal relationships between adult siblings, cousins, and myriad others. This large, interconnected group places considerable value on the day-to-day, or at least weekly, interactions of its members. In an idealized version, there is a buzzy, noisy, chatty atmosphere in small spaces. Many people are part of a family's daily life, and a grandparent, an uncle, an aunt, or a godparent can always be counted on to change a diaper, keep an eye on a toddler, or monitor an adolescent's high jinks in the neighborhood. Overwhelmed parents get a much-needed break, and their children find some individual attention as this or that relative lends a hand.

The line in a poem by Jimmy Santiago Baca (2009) at the beginning of this chapter reflects the great comfort and even a sense of affluence that comes from socializing with family and friends for impoverished immigrants who lack other sources of support and entertainment. Several concepts of connectedness underlie descriptions of family organization.

FAMILISMO OR FAMILY INTERDEPENDENCE

Familismo is a concept has been used repeatedly for decades to characterize Latino cultural preferences about family organization (Keefe et al., 1978). It connotes a commitment to inclusiveness, participation, and strong relationships in nuclear and extended family networks. Visits are frequent and helpful exchanges commonplace. Boundaries around the Latino nuclear family are flexible, expanding to include grandparents, uncles, aunts, or cousins with natural ease. Children who are orphaned or whose parents are divorced or have left for the U.S. may be included in the household of relatives, along with adults who have remained single or become widowed. Both vertical and lateral kinship ties, up to third and fourth cousins, are often close.

Familismo also suggests the attribute of collectivism or interdependence. Many family functions are shared, such as caretaking and control of children, financial responsibility, companionship, emotional support, and problem solving. Families emphasize collective rather than individual ownership or obligation, and affiliation and cooperation rather than confrontation and competition. It is the dominant culture-specific concept used among researchers and clinicians studying and treating Latinos, although some researchers have raised the issue as to whether indeed it is a unique characteristic of Latinos or it is shared by many other cultural groups, including whites (Schwartz, 2007). This, of course, makes sense based on the assumption that all human beings need both autonomy and connectedness, in different ways at various times in the life cycle. Cultural

variations may be a matter of degree and types of interpersonal involvement. Thus, it may be best to move away from dichotomies of individualism versus collectivism, since these are both human needs that exist in variable forms and at variable times in the life of a person and a family.

Clinicians need to be mindful of making pan-ethnic generalizations about Latinos and instead increase the complexity of their approach via awareness that different Latino groups and different generations may have different degrees and definitions of *familismo* (Baca-Zinn & Wells, 2000). For example, high rates of marriage and two-parent families, which are often thought to be components of *familism*, apply more to Mexicans and Cubans than to Puerto Ricans or Dominicans and more to first- than to second-generation Latinos (Cherlin, 2010), who also tend to have smaller families (see Chapter 2).

It is useful for practitioners to explore with families their degree of *familismo* by inquiring about its components: proximity to kin, contact with kin, and degree of kin support (Sarkisian et al., 2006). Studies find that Mexicans tend to reside with family or live near kin more frequently than Puerto Ricans and other Latinos or whites. Mexicans have more face-to-face contact and contact by phone or letter than whites. Family researchers focus on three types of kin support: emotional or affective support, financial support, and instrumental or practical support. Latinas appear to be more likely than white women to receive child care from relatives, and this is thought to serve both instrumental and emotional purposes.

Culture or Socioeconomic Class?

Does the prevalence of familism lie in the culture or in socioeconomic need? Some recent research stresses the impact of socioeconomic need over culture as an explanation for extended family reliance (Sarkisian et al., 2006). This is a compelling and most likely accurate finding, but it seems possible that it is a both–and situation whereby culture and class together intensify the pattern, since an emphasis on family cohesion exists even when no economic needs are pressing. It is possible that the size of families, developed under the influence of Roman Catholic values, contributes to a lifestyle of family interconnectedness and mutual help.

Family Size or *Familismo*?

Little attention has been paid to comparisons of family life in small and large family systems. Among Latino groups, descriptions of *familismo* are most prevalent among Mexicans, who also have the largest number of children. It would seem fruitful to consider that the sheer size of the

household changes the texture of family life. As systems, small families operate differently from large families. In a classic study of 100 large families, James H. Bossard (1956) found many unique characteristics in child rearing, personal interactions among siblings, and individual feelings of security. Perhaps because of the historical context of that study, when American families were becoming smaller, many aspects of large families were described as vulnerabilities, but nonetheless the argument about the need to understand different systems according to their size is a compelling one.

The culture of a large or a small family organization shapes many values in the domain of parenting and child rearing. These values relate to issues of individual attention and control, the nature of sibling relationships, the emphasis on romantic or parental aspects of a couple's life, and a perspective on family problems as maximized or minimized. A summary of differences appears in Table 10.1.

A look at the column for small families quickly reveals how much of what is learned as normative and valued as desirable by the helping professions in the U.S. is based on a small family ideal, and how easy it would be to attribute negative evaluations to the workings of large families. This is an area where theoreticians, researchers, and practitioners could benefit from clarifying what is likely to be expected as elements of daily family life in small and large family systems and avoid imposing the preferred standards or ideologies of one system over another. Most importantly, it seems likely that large family systems have different resiliencies, risks, and vulnerabilities than small ones. Knowing more about these would help the work of multicultural practitioners.

TABLE 10.1. Family Size and Family Culture

	Small families	Large families
Parenthood	Intensive	Extensive
Individual attention	High	Limited
Control	Democratic	Authoritarian
Kin network	Exclusion	Inclusion
Values	Individualism Ambition Separation	Collectivism Duty Integration
Couple	Romantic	Parental
Siblings	Small/peripheral	Large/central
Problems	Magnified	Minimized

The Role of Family Rituals

Nowhere is *familismo* better reflected, and reinforced, than in family rituals—a key component of family life for many Latino groups. Rituals are often extended family celebrations that proclaim and reaffirm unity and connection. They may mark special events or occasions, but they also have a place in daily life. Not one week may go by without one or both extended families requesting the presence of all nuclear family members for some type of gathering. The most common ritual for many families is *la comida semanal* (the weekly meal) at each of the two grandparents' households, which usually takes place on weekends. This weekly custom includes all the unmarried or married offspring with spouses, children, and drop-in relatives of all ages. Visitors of any of the regular members may also be present.

Middle- and upper-class families from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and South America often continue some form of these gatherings in the U.S., in part because they have the space, the household help, and the economic means. But most immigrant families are poor and have shrunken extended networks. Still, informal rituals may persist or emerge—a family picnic in a city park, or a get-together for no other reason than to share a simple meal.

As a great believer in the weekly shared meal and its importance for family connection and identity, I often ask immigrant clients if they might create a modified version of *la comida semanal*, perhaps eating together after church on Sunday or going for an ice cream after the children's soccer game. A weekly family meal may involve parents and adolescent children in cooking and cleaning, and this ritual in turn may renew the tradition of inviting significant others, if only to share a pizza and eat group style. Whatever their form, these gatherings symbolize *familismo*—solidarity, pride, loyalty, and a sense of belonging and obligation to one's family ties.

The Familial Self

Most clinicians are trained to stress values of autonomy and independence and may wonder how the individual functions in such a collective world. First, it is important to recognize that striving toward autonomy and independence are human needs that Latinos and other collectivistic groups share. The term *familial self* may also explain how Latino individuals participate in life among many.

Psychoanalyst Alan Roland (1988), in observing Japanese and Indian people, coined the term *familial self* to describe a sense of self that includes one's close relationships as part of who one is in collectivistic-oriented

cultures. This self–family construction is useful in understanding Latinos' dedication to children, parents, family unity, and family honor. Money, objects, home, and other possessions are shared easily, perhaps because a familial self is tied to a different conception about individual rights and property (Falicov, 2001). The familial self is balanced by an inner reserve of unshared feelings, which Roland calls a *private self*, behind which all kinds of secret feelings and fantasies are kept. This inner separateness may explain in part how Latinos can individuate from their parents' nurturance and control, while maintaining considerable emotional closeness and mutual dependency for a lifetime.

Closeness Pathologized

Familismo and the *familial self* construct extend our understanding of Latinos' preference for close connections with family. They also serve as important comparisons to mainstream European American ideas about family life, and as such, help practitioners avoid applying diagnostic labels (e.g., *enmeshment*) that do not fit. Indeed, what constitutes "excessive" connectedness in one culture may have entirely different meanings in another.

While European American practitioners may be at risk for pathologizing Latino closeness, they may also incorrectly label the behaviors that characterize such close family connections. For example, gender socialization motivates women to be supportive of their children and their husbands and to "sacrifice" themselves in silent ways that may be alien to European American culture. In mainstream American psychotherapy, this can be mistaken for codependence.

Inclán and Hernández (1993), two Puerto Rican psychologists working in New York, wrote an interesting and useful cultural critique of codependence, the construct so widely used as the basis for self-help and treatment approaches to chemical dependency. Inclán and Hernández argue that the concept of codependence is embedded in values of separation–individuation and individualism. Clearly the notion of codependence needs critical review before application to Latinos because the changes these "codependent" clients are expected to make amount to a rejection of *familismo*. The pervasive value of *familismo* emphasizes the duties of family members to help one another always, but even more so in the face of serious problems such as alcohol or drug addiction.

Poverty and family honor also play a role in intensifying the bond of *familismo*, because they promote even stronger family ties as a survival safety net. Further, family honor dictates shielding family conflict, shame, or deviation from external scrutiny, particularly for immigrants who already fear prejudice. Professionals' misunderstanding of these Latino preferences can result in their labeling *familismo* as pathological codependency or enmeshment, even more so for those belonging to the second generation, since they are expected to be more acculturated than the first. Nevertheless, situations arise when family protectiveness is excessive or counterproductive.

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Understanding the unique brand of connectedness that characterizes many large family networks helps us "read" and compare MECAmaps of family organization. Crucial to this exploration is to identify the players and their specific roles and relationships. In this section I explore cultural meanings about extended family members such as grandparents, nonkin "family members," godparents, the authority of parents, the devotion between mother and son, and the lifelong bond among siblings, both in situations of their physical or their psychological presence. In the conceptual descriptions below, I include implications for clinical practice related to the various aspects of family organization.

The Physical Presence of Extended Family: Questioning Myths

From a family systems viewpoint, a large and stable collectivistic group generates complexity, emotional attachments, options for fulfilling instrumental and expressive functions, and alternatives for resolving problems and modeling behaviors. In extended family settings, multiple caretakers may create various forms of primary attachments, so processes of separation–individuation and marital differentiation may evolve differently and require other parameters of analyses than those applied to small nuclear families. As we attempt to understand the role of physically present, extended family members in immigrant families, we have few guidelines that address the complexities of these family arrangements.

When extended family members are physically present, they may play a significant role in shoring up the family as it struggles for continuity and copes with change. Their sense of familism drives a concern for one another's lives, a pulling together to weather crises, a sociocentric child rearing that makes children care about others around them, the pooling of money and resources, and the keeping of adult children at home until marriage and even after. These behaviors are a measure of relational resilience (Walsh, 2006).

The presence of extended family members or even familism does not, however, guarantee that all is well for the immigrant family. The concept

of family closeness is sometimes brought to such idealized "heights" that stereotypical pictures of cozy family life reign, and the tensions and disconnections among extended family members are discounted or ignored. Indeed, not everything is good in extended families, and nobody knows it better than the people who live in them. Like the Mexican saying quoted at the beginning of this chapter, *"Entre los parientes y el sol, cuánto más lejos mejor"* (Just like it is best to keep distance from the sun, so it is the case with one's relatives).

The presence of extended family may ensure a protective context of language, customs, money lending and more, but it does not ensure a conflict-free family environment or even predict traditionalism in all areas of life. Large families generate different problems than small families. For example, triangles involving husband, wife, and mother-in-law or involving mother, grandmother, and child may be more common in three-generational settings than in two-generational arrangements. Closely tied, richly joined networks may generate their own problematic patterns, such as same-generation alliances and triangles, which need to be considered both culturally and contextually.

PRACTICE IDEA: CONSIDERING THE MEANING OF TRIANGLES IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

In two articles, I (Falicov & Brudner-White, 1983; Falicov, 1998) undertake a critical analysis of the cultural- and contextual-bound nature of the triangulation construct. Family therapists often regard triangles as automatically indicating problematic interactions in families, without consideration of the various meanings and configurations of triangles in settings other than the two-generation family unit.

Kith and Kin

The nuclear family models most therapists use are too narrow for application to many Latinos, so we must think beyond their confines. It is important to ask if other people live with the family that came for treatment or how present are absent family members.

PRACTICE IDEA: DRAWING MULTIGENERATIONAL GENOGRAMS

Family therapists need to become adept at drawing multigenerational genograms that include not only kin members outside the nuclear unit,

such as a grandmother who functions as mother, but also non-kin or "fictive kin" members who have been anointed as family, such as godparents or friends of the family (see Chapter 1 for assessment tools).

The Presence of Grandparents

Many Latino children have the reassuring presence of a grandparent around, a fact that is related to conditions of poverty and a tendency toward inclusivity and trigenerational arrangements. A grandparent might intercede in favor of the child against the parent or might provide shelter for the child. Grandmothers can provide the influential knowledge embedded in the language, the foods, the customs, the religion, and traditional practices about childbearing and child rearing (García Coll et al., 1996). These influential transfers of knowledge may buffer a family from some of the effects of urban poverty and acculturative stress on daily life. In situations of physical abuse, grandparents can become advocates for the child, whether openly or covertly, making a significant difference in the abused child's life and helping break a legacy of violence for the next generation (see Chapter 12).

Transnational parents are primarily dependent on the grandmother (or another female relative) who remains in the home country and takes over the parenting role. A grandmother may often feel stressed with responsibilities of taking care of the children of several of her children, earning a living, and care taking of her aging parents or other unattached family adults who all live at home. Chapters 1 and 4 contain several case narratives in which the presence of the grandmother during pre- and postmigration is essential to survival.

Many Latino children call their mothers and grandmothers by closely similar names, such as *Mami* and *Mamita*. A definition of *Mamá* (or Mom) that is inclusive of grandmothers and sometimes of aunts is pervasive in Latin American cultures. In Chapter 4 we talked about the concept of "other mother." A recent children's poetry book, titled *Love to Mama: A Tribute to Mothers* (Mora, 2001), contains as many poems about grandmothers as it does about mothers and aunts. The author, a Latina, dedicates the book to "all who mother us." Of course, there is also the grandmother who defies the generalization of benevolence.

PRACTICE IDEA: INVITING EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS TO SESSIONS

Clinicians must avail themselves of these natural aids (and aides) in the large family system by inviting grandparents and aunts, uncles and

godparents to the family or individual sessions and by connecting via transnational technologies because engaging their participation can facilitate parental or child change.

Other People in the Household

For new immigrants and low-income Latinos, it is not uncommon to have seven or eight people sharing a room, and several people sleeping in one double bed. The family will likely reveal the important "others" as the barriers of institutional mistrust melt away.

After a few sessions, a family consisting of mother, father, and three children began talking about "the other family." In their rented apartment they were housing another family of four who had recently arrived from a town near their native home in Oaxaca, Mexico. The "new" family was paying to rent one of the two bedrooms. Both families shared one bathroom and kitchen. Although it helped pay the rent, the arrangement was creating serious tensions and jealousies, rather than the anticipated help and child care, and may have aggravated marital problems and fighting among the children.

Another family, from Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico, consisted of a mother, three grown daughters, and a well-to-do father who apparently lived with them on and off and paid for their therapy. But this was a different type of family arrangement: This was the father's "on-the-side" family, his *casa chica*. He had another legal family of wife and five grown children, his *casa grande*. He was reluctant to participate in the therapy with his second family, because he was going with his (legal) first family to therapy somewhere else and that therapist had prohibited him from seeing his second family while he was solving problems with the first. The other therapist had quickly promoted an acculturative stance, wanting the father to conform to European American monogamy with his "first" family, not considering the possible disservice to his "second" family and to his attachment to them.

It is not uncommon for men or women who migrated without their families to live in groups and take on newcomers as a gesture of help, often with good outcomes such as the new person being a good cook or cleaner. But at other times, the open-door policy can prove costly, such as when the newcomer leaves abruptly a few days later, robbing all tenants of their radios, watches, money, and clothing.

PRACTICE IDEA: BEING CURIOUS AND OPEN ABOUT FAMILY ORGANIZATION

Rather than taking an acculturative stance, it is best to politely ask questions about who is included in the family setting and give each family member an opportunity to voice his or her feelings and opinions: "Is this type of family composition common in your country? Among your family and friends? How does it work? What tensions does it produce, if any?"

The Presence of Service Personnel

It is common both in Latin America and in the U.S. for Latinos to hire the services of maids, nannies, and gardeners. Although these practices vary with socioeconomic level, it is common even among working women of humble means to rely on the services of a housekeeper or babysitter to help raise children or clean house, sometimes in an exchange-for-services mode.

A family who asked for a consultation consisted of a single, professional Puerto Rican mother and her two teenage daughters, whom she had raised "alone" since they were babies. Then I learned that Lupita, maid, cook, babysitter, and "jill"-of-all-trades, had lived with the three of them and slept with the girls for the past 10 years. Lupita had just now brought her 12-year-old son from El Salvador to join this family. When Lupita came at my request for an information session, not only did she know much more about the girls than the mother, but she also turned out to be the best cotherapist I'd ever had, and the mother's most sensitive coach. In a similar situation, a husband and wife, both white professionals, agreed to include in family sessions their maid who was helping them raise their three adopted children.

Maids have both a silent presence and a great impact in the lives of children and adults in Latino families, and they should be considered part of the extended family network. Denise Chavez, the vibrant, uplifting Chicana writer, devotes sections of her 1994 novel *Face of an Angel* to what she calls "The Book of Services." There she sings the praise of some of those unsung Latino heroes: the maids, gardeners, and waitresses. In a book titled *Doméstica*, the sociologist Pierette Hondagnue-Sotelo (2007) highlights the voices and experiences of immigrant workers from Mexico and Central America, cleaning and caring for children in affluent households. The author also includes the outlook of the women who employ them in Los Angeles. I owe one of these women the gift of a secure attachment.

Nelly was an illiterate, indigent, 18-year-old Argentine indigenous young woman who came from the northeast provinces down to Buenos Aires as a live-in maid to work for my family when I was a 9-month-old baby because my mother had become pregnant again. She quietly vanished from my life 19 years later, just prior to my wedding, when she was "no longer required" in my parents' household. Although she never told me, I always suspected that she had wanted to leave much earlier, but must have known that I so very much needed her warm and comforting presence in my life. That she could not continue to be part of the family when she ceased to be *una empleada* (an employee) represents another excruciating social injustice toward "service" people. I later learned that she had a baby girl and had named her Celia Beatriz, my first name and my sister's first name.

PRACTICE IDEA: EXPLORING INVOLVEMENT OF EXTENDED FAMILY IN PRESENTING ISSUE

The involvement of extended family and nonfamily helpers or friends with the nuclear family should always be explored. To what degree are these other players part of the difficulties or part of the solution? Would therapy with the nuclear family benefit from the participation of others? A simple question such as "Does anybody else live with you?" or "Who helps you with the children when you're working?" begins this exploration. I invite domestic workers and nannies to join sessions and have found parents to be open to this inclusion. These adults often have more intimate knowledge of the children's lives and have specific praise and specific complaints about how the children behave toward them and others. They are often a source of very helpful ideas on how to solve problems that they have not dared, or have not been asked, to express before. The emotional attachment between these helpers and children, and occasionally between the adults, is often significant. However, these attachments and resources will remain undetected unless the practitioner inquiries about them.

The Presence of *la Tía* or *el Tío* and *los Primos* (Aunts, Uncles, and Cousins)

Unmarried Latino men and women may live in the home of married siblings for many reasons: for economic benefits, or to provide help, or because they are recently arrived or divorced, or because the parent for whom they were caring has died. The presence of a maternal or paternal aunt is so common among my client families that I have come to label it *la tía* (the aunt). The therapist usually discovers the importance of *la tía* serendipitously, similarly to the other-family pattern mentioned previously. In some cases, the aunt serves useful affective and instrumental functions while subsystem boundaries are maintained. In other cases, depending on her age and role interactions within the family, the aunt may form a cross-generational coalition with a parent or child, or may attempt to act as an intermediary between the two, sometimes benefiting growth, but other times blocking it, as in the following example.

Charito Pérez, an unmarried 33-year-old woman, moved in with her brother, his wife, and their children. She quickly formed a coalition with María, her 14-year-old niece, against María's father, her brother. María claimed that her Aunt Charito understood young people much better than her father, especially in areas of fashion, curfew, and friends. There was some truth to this, in that the aunt had recently arrived from Cuba with "more advanced" ideas than Mr. Pérez, who had migrated 20 years before and held to traditional ways, especially with regard to his expectations of women. The aunt's role as mediator was a resource at times, but her protective stance sometimes prevented Mr. and Mrs. Pérez from reaching agreements directly with their daughter. In addition, this coalition also inflamed the covert conflict between Charito and Mr. Pérez, who exerted his control as older brother rather sternly.

PRACTICE IDEA: DETERMINING WHETHER EXTENDED MEMBERS ARE A HINDRANCE OR A HELP

In these situations, the clinician needs to be careful not to conceptualize automatically the presence of the unmarried "stranger" in the family as a problem or as a help. Nor should the practitioner believe that a triangle always reflects underlying marital conflict, as there are many types of triangles in large families. Benevolent triangulations could provide a culturally congruent, indirect avenue for productive communications (Falicov, 1998).

Relationships with peers, and particularly same-sex peers—whether siblings, cousins. or friends—are so important for Latinos that it's not unusual for them to be implicated in the presenting problem of an individual or family. In Chapter 7 we discussed how in Verónica's case, a high degree of stress could be understood as part of a peer triangle that involved her older cousin's attempts to seduce her boyfriend. Family peer relationships can be a source of support and fun, but they may also be

openly conflicted or comprise a stressor that affects the individual client or family.

Godparents: *Comadres* and *Compadres*

In European American culture, godparents typically play an honorary role in family life. In Latino culture, godparents may be vital participants with significant status in families. The Latino custom of *compadrazgo* establishes two sets of extended family relationships: one between *padrinos y ahijados* (godparents and their godchildren); the other between the parents and the godparents, who become *comadres* and *compadres* (co-parents). Many Mexicans and Mexican Americans live in the same towns as their *comadres* and *compadres* and use their help in a variety of ways. Godparents are equivalent to an additional set of parents who have acquired formal kinship through a religious ceremony. They may act as guardians or sponsors of the godchild and care for him or her in emergencies, and they may be chosen from among members of the extended family or from outside. Godparents perform different roles and functions at various life-cycle transitions and rituals, such as baptisms, communions, weddings, and funerals (see Chapter 12).

PRACTICE IDEA: EXPLORING THE RESOURCE OF GODPARENTS AND OTHER RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

In many instances, migration separates the child and the family from the godparents. But near or far, godparents can have transnational auxiliary functions as advocates for the child, adolescent, or even for the parent. They can provide temporary relief for a sick or stressed parent or become an intermediary between parents and children. They can be especially valuable resources when therapy is addressing life-cycle impasses. In the case of an out-of-control adolescent, a godmother provided a "demilitarized zone" in her home so the parents and adolescent could begin to deal with their conflicts. Given their relative formality and emotional distance, godparents are often more effective with unruly adolescents than the biological parents and even the grandparents, who sometimes are too partial toward the child.

Whether working with individuals, couples, or other groupings, practitioners are challenged to expand their unit of observation beyond the nuclear unit, while keeping in mind that extended family relationships may be part of the problem or part of the solution. Although relatives and godparents are seldom mentioned by families, practitioners might find a valuable resource if they take the initiative to ask about *abuelos, tíos, tías, primos comadres* and *compadres*. Clinicians must avail themselves of these natural aids in the large family system, by inviting grandparents or aunts, uncles, and godparents to family or individual sessions.

The Psychological Presence of Extended Family: Virtual Connections

For transnational families, *familismo* may be manifest in the persistence of long-distance attachments and loyalties. These loyalties are manifested in multiple ways, from the commitment to communicate at long distance to efforts at reunification. The family members and the ideologies of these richly joined systems make their presence felt at a psychological level. Migration may exacerbate family problems that already existed, and these tensions may continue at long distance because families remain connected psychologically, and often virtually.

When extended family is far away, *la familia* may become the emotional container that holds both future dreams not yet realized and lost meanings that are no longer recoverable. At its most concrete, immigrants send remittances back home in exchange for collective caretaking of remaining family members (children, elders), thus reinforcing a traditional system of emotional and economic interdependence. At a more abstract level, the idea itself of a three-generational family can trigger other large existential meanings, such as one's lost national identity. A study of young adults (Troya & Rosenberg, 1999) who had migrated to Mexico as children of parents who were seeking political refuge from Chile and Argentina demonstrates the powerful psychological presence of absent relatives. When asked for their spontaneous images in response to the word *patria* (fatherland) or *tierra* (land), they answered with the street or house where the grandmother or the aunt lived, reflecting or perhaps creating anew deep intergenerational bonds between country and family—a psychological familism. Chapter 5 explored how members of the second generation do not necessarily abandon internally the connectedness of extended family systems even as they acquire language and other external adaptation skills of the mainstream.

PRACTICE IDEA: ASKING ABOUT THOSE LEFT BEHIND

As we saw in Chapter 3, when constructing a migration narrative, it is important for practitioners to ask about those left behind. Their psychological presence can be a source of comfort and narrative coherence in a client's life, and it can also be a source of conflict, preoccupation, or sadness that is tied to the presenting issues or to the possible solutions.

HIERARCHIES IN NUCLEAR AND EXTENDED SETTINGS

The Authority of Parents

Despite the presence of godparents, aunts, uncles, maids, and other players in the life of a Latino family, parents clearly have top billing, even in situations when separated children are raised by other family members, as we have seen in Chapter 4. Although parents certainly care for their children, closeness does not necessarily mean permeable boundaries, or even a great deal of self-disclosure, because too much closeness could threaten another strong organizing value: parental authority. Rules organized around age are the most important determinants of authority, with older men and women granted the greatest leadership and influence.

Latino parents command the *respeto* (respect) of children. For many Mexicans, Nicaraguans, Costa Ricans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, etc., *respeto* means a relationship involving filial dutifulness within a hierarchical framework. For example, a 40-year-old Cuban woman considered it a sin to be disrespectful by not responding in a timely way to parents' needs for contact, involvement, and financial support, the way she perceived her European American husband failing to respond to his parents. The authority of parents may persist throughout life, attenuated for adult children. Compare this situation with the European American concept of "personal authority" (Williamson, 1981), which underlines autonomy from parental approval as the hallmark of optimal adult development.

The Status and Sacrifice of Mothers

Certain cultural prescriptions pertaining to gender also bolster parental status. The idealized role of the mother has been equated with self-denial and abnegation. When her patience is exhausted, a mother may become upset, nervous, or quietly suffer, but she is not expected to take time off or demand collective cooperation. A clinician may see the need to encourage a client toward great self-investment in personal care for her own well-being, but the therapist may not succeed unless the need for self-care is framed in ways that allows the client to be better able to care for others. For example, in an empowerment support group for women, the *promotora* or facilitator (see Chapter 6) constantly brings up the importance of self-care until it begins to be internalized and put into action, but the concept itself appears somewhat alien to most of the participants.

The role of mother comprises a "mixed blessing." Latina mothers may experience considerable anxiety and a high degree of responsibility in relation to their children's safety. Mexican, Dominican, and Puerto Rican mothers may feel especially anxious about the dangers of the street and the vulnerability of their children to Los Angeles or New York gangs and believe that this danger will increase in proportion to the child's separation from his or her mother's lap. On the positive side, the social position of "mother" carries considerable status and commands respect, including from women themselves.

In Chapters 9 and 11, I referred to the counternarratives of Latina women that resist being seen by mainstream America as subjugated and oppressed. They assert with pride the fundamental role they play in their children's moral education and the care with which they create a sense of "home" for family members (Villenas, 2001). In payment for their sacrifice and dedication, mothers are the subject of much devotion, especially apparent in the lavish Mother's Day celebrations of Mexico. Indeed, mothers, at least ideally, often enjoy a lifelong reverence from their children, and especially from their sons.

The Mother–Son Bond in Patriarchal Contexts

Nowhere is parent–child culturally prescribed closeness and devotion greater than in the relationship between a mother and an oldest or a favorite son. This bond is mutually supportive. The mother may have a strong influence even over a grown adult son, and he in turn may always worship and side with his mother. A number of hypotheses about this powerful attachment go beyond mere emotional connectedness and enter the realm of family politics (Falicov & Brudner-White, 1983; Falicov, 1998). Some writers speak of the emotional isolation of the mother from her husband in patriarchal families, and the subsequent formation of a supportive subfamily unit of mother and children that excludes the husband. Still others regard the mother's efforts to instill a fierce loyalty and devotion in her son as a way of undermining the authority of the patriarch and gaining ascendancy over him.

In my clinical experience, the devotion and protection of sons toward their mothers is more apparent than that of daughters, in spite of the fact that mothers and daughters spend more time together and share more intimacies. Perhaps the son's protection of the mother is an expression of a benign or protective *machismo* into which he may have been socialized to counteract the more traditional and negative domineering *machismo* of the father. This role of protector may at times interfere with the son's relationship with his wife. In Chapter 1, the example of the Díaz Ortiz's family illustrates how a son convinces his wife to leave their infant with his mother for practical reasons, but also to decrease his mother's pain of separation and his own anxiety over the departure. Further discussion and illustration of triangles between husband, mother, and wife appear in Chapter 11 and the case of Olivia, Federico, and his mother in Chapter 14.

The Meaning of Fatherhood

In the public's narrative of Latino gender constructions, the father is expected to protect the mother by demanding that the children obey and help her, while he remains only peripherally involved with daily caretaking, if at all. In ethnographic narratives, fathers may be playful, affectionate, and do quite a bit of caretaking, particularly of young children (Gutmann, 1996; see also Chapter 11).

The traditional pattern of father in the role of disciplinarian and mother as mediator between father and children may become more evident and rigid during the child's adolescence. Further, the stresses of migration, culture change, and unemployment or underemployment may contribute to a weakening of the father's authority. Sometimes a father who appears controlling and intrusive with his adolescent children may simply be trying to include himself in the family in the only way he knows how. I asked Elena's father, Mr. Morales, a Mexican immigrant, if this might be the case.

MR. MORALES: ON SUFFERING A "CIVILIAN COUP D'ÉTAT"

A congenial, feisty man, Mr. Morales rapidly answered me in the third person (a form of common communication called an *indirecta*): "He, who appears to have military manners, has in fact suffered a civilian 'coup d'état' years ago and has never been able to regain the presidency of the country." This metaphor for the ousted father became a central theme in the therapy. Mr. Morales explained that he felt guilty toward his wife because in spite of great effort, he couldn't offer the family the financial stability he had originally envisioned.

Mr. Morales recalled that because of complications after Mrs. Morales had their fourth child, the lack of medical insurance led to medical bills that took many years to pay. To compensate for his failure, he tried to enlist the older children's cooperation in housework, hoping to make Mrs. Morales's life easier. The more the father insisted, the more the adolescents resisted, rendering him frustrated and ineffective. Now Mr. Morales could see that some of his attempted solutions had become part of the problem, but he did not know what else he could do. Having him shift from a disciplinarian to a nurturing role became one of the goals of the clinical work.

While many theories regard Latino men's dominance as based only on traditional cultural values (see Chapter 11), other theories see it as a response to structural factors in society. Male dominance may take on

greater significance when social stratification systems exclude members of a minority from public roles, access to resources, or fair recognition for effort or other social rewards. The immigrant's father position may also be diminished by the migration process in a number of ways: underemployment, lack of language skills, and immigrant status.

A father such as Mr. Morales, who assumes a disciplinarian role in a culturally isolated situation, is less acceptable to the children because he no longer represents a community of adults who uphold the same values. The aloofness may be increased if he migrated first and his wife and children came later. The spouses may have never totally recovered from the separation, or the father's promise of a better future may never have materialized, decreasing permanently his prestige and influence. This situation may be exacerbated if the wife has joined the workforce to help out financially. The husband may forcefully assert his authority with his wife, who in turn signals to the children that their father is domineering and unfair. The children may see the mother as victimized and begin to protect her, or they may feel bound by gratitude to her. This type of family triangle may present special difficulties with adolescents who become scornful and distant from the father, perhaps irreversibly.

The widespread cultural stereotype of the Latino father as the dominant, authoritarian figure that makes all the decisions, is master of the household, and uses corporal punishment to discipline the children is contradicted by other images, views, and research data accumulated over time.

Changing belief systems about gender roles (see Chapter 11 and Falicov, 2010) coincide with my own observations, although I have also encountered the more traditional authoritarian father and self-sacrificing mother, particularly in my clients' genograms of their families of origin. My interpretation is simply that with any large group of people of any nation, considerable diversity will be found to support a variety of patterns. The fairest statement seems to be that Latino families are in transition, perhaps not so different from many families in Latin America and everywhere, and they display a mixture of traditional and egalitarian preferences.

Cultural Styles or Cultural Masks?

This chapter has addressed the danger of pathologizing *familismo* as enmeshment or codependency. At the other extreme lies the danger of romanticizing Latino family connectedness, including mother–son bonds that may be maladaptive (see discussion of ethnic stereotyping as bias of assessment in Chapter 3, pp. 98–100). There are situations when a clinician may see a connection between a presenting pattern and a cultural

preference but is not aware that sometimes the appearance of culture may mask or camouflage other family processes that could be problematic and not truly cultural. Thus, clinicians who endeavor to be culturally respectful may be at risk for disregarding a number of fairly extreme, possibly transcultural human problems that may appear as closeness but actually transcend cultural stylistic preferences. These problems are evident in repetitive, rigid behaviors and imbalances of interpersonal influence that lead to developmental impasses instead of growth. Such was the case of Frank González Torres, Jr.'s family. This family of three illustrates parent–child connectedness gone awry, even though it has a culturally consonant flavor. The focus on the child at the expense of the marital relationship, the self-sacrifice of the mother, and the extreme closeness between the mother and the boy all had a culturally plausible quality, but the degree, the length of time, the rigidity of these behaviors, and the consequences for family members were clearly beyond cultural expectations.

FRANK JR., AND HIS MOTHER: "SEPARATING FROM MY SON WAS LIKE DEATH TO ME"

Frank Jr. was 9 years old when he was referred to therapy for night terrors and multiple fears. His mother, Mrs. Eudora González Torres, was a heavy-set and very properly attired 45-year-old woman who looked much older. She was born and raised in Costa Rica and lived with her parents before she got married in her mid-30s. She had wanted to go to nursing school, but her mother did not let her for fear that she might get sexually involved with somebody. Frank's father, meanwhile, had come from a poor and chaotic Honduran family. He had left his family in his early teens and had fended for himself on the streets, but remained suspicious and distant from others. When Eudora met Frank Sr. he was a single, very heavy, slow-mannered man a few years older than she. Frank Sr. was ready to get married then, but Eudora felt she had to wait until her ill mother died before she could leave home. After her mother died, Frank Sr. and Eudora got married and migrated together to the U.S.

Their initial marital adjustment was smooth until Frank Jr. was born. In their words "the apple of the discord" was planted. Instantly mother and son became an inseparable unit. They slept in the same bed, displacing Mr. González Torres to the living room sofa. Disagreements about handling the boy mounted. Eudora protected the son and called the father a brutal and uncaring ugly monster, a characterization that did not fit how the father behaved in the interview.

The family first attempted to get help for Frank Jr. in kindergarten when he developed extreme separation anxiety. Prior to the boy entering first grade, mother and son suffered a conjoint emotional break and were

hospitalized and heavily sedated. The psychiatrists felt that the mother–son symbiosis was an intractable situation and strongly advised sending the boy to live with relatives in Costa Rica. Although Mrs. González Torres said the separation was "like death to me," she complied with the plan.

After some time, Eudora recovered, Frank Sr. returned to the matrimonial bed, and the marital discord subsided. But soon after, the relatives reported that Frank Jr. was having nightmares again. Immediately the mother went to fetch the boy. Like a powerful magnet mother and son embraced each other again and locked the father out in mind and body. Soon after Frank Jr. developed terrors about going anywhere alone, including the bathroom.

I supported and engaged the father in therapy because he offered a hope for movement in a rigidly closed system. But when Frank Sr. began to respond, Eudora wanted him out of the session. Attempting to form an alliance and a boundary by seeing her alone prior to the conjoint sessions proved fruitless. She kept on repeating: "Poor me and poor little boy." We decided to challenge the rigidity indirectly by positively connoting the symptom and supporting Eudora to help her son by going to school every day with Frank Jr., sitting with him at all times, and monitoring each and every one of his activities, including lunch and bathroom breaks. Eudora needed to ask written permission from the school principal for each of the activities every day. Contrary to our expectations of paradoxical effects, not only did Eudora not balk at the amount of work involved, but she cheerfully agreed to do everything. Gradually, however, it was Frank Jr. who began to react. The other boys were teasing him and calling him a baby. He asked his mother to stop treating him so. One day Frank Jr. abruptly announced that he wanted to have his own apartment with no mother, father, or wife–just two pets, a cat and a dog. He would train the cat and the dog to live together from an early age, because "if you get them old, they fight all the time, like they [his parents] do." Perhaps Frank Jr. would begin to separate and grow up a little after all. Like other breakthroughs with this family, this insight was short-lived.

Although cultural patterns, primarily those of family organization and family life cycle, were entertained, the therapist did not fell prey to the cultural mask of close family relationships or a culturally normative mother–son attachment. The pattern in this family appeared to be one of oppressive symbiotic embrace that left no room for individual autonomy. The therapist worked to develop a multilevel interdisciplinary treatment plan that involved the use of medication for mother and son and working collaboratively with school personnel to keep Frank in school as much as possible. Couple therapy was recommended and geared to create a better boundary between marital and parental subsystems. The internal workings of the individuals and the family unit were much more relevant to the treatment plan than issues of migration, cultural diversity, or social justice. The pattern presentation of this family fit with the pattern described in Chapter 3 regarding

predisposition toward mental illness, and the treatment plan followed from this assessment.

The González Torres family continued to have severe problems and failed to achieve any greater degree of individuation or separation. This type of extreme overinvolvement, fusion, or symbiosis is of a different magnitude and quality than the stylistic preference for connectedness and interdependence described here for Latinos. An article by Green and Werner (1996) makes an important contribution by differentiating the concept of enmeshment into two different concepts: "functional closeness-caregiving" and "dysfunctional intrusiveness." Green and Werner argue that some family relationships have a "superficial form of closeness" (high levels of contact, high degrees of disclosure) that derive from coercion, collusion, and anxious attachment rather than from mutuality.

> Like a close embrace held too long or too hard, the inability to free each other tends to be experienced as an act of insecurity or control rather than an act of affection or support. Labeling such relationships as "extremely close" or "cohesive" masks their other qualities and potentially invalidates the experience of the participants. (Green & Werner, 1996, p. 120)

As discussed in Chapter 3, severe mental disorders can be aggravated by migration and acculturative stress, but often they belong to categories of universal, or at least transnational, human problems. Immigrant families, like other families, come to therapy with problems of this nature, although the content, meanings, and coping strategies may be organized around culture-specific issues.

THE SIBLING BOND AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Within the collectivistic or large-family Latino ideology, sibling ties are strong. Fraternal solidarity and mutual help are ideals that parents instill in their children from an early age. During childhood, siblings—along with first cousins, or *primo hermanos*—may be constant companions. Parents prefer that their children have their own brothers, sisters, and cousins as playmates, and children seem to be happy to do so. Competition and fighting among siblings is tolerated, whereas cooperation, sharing, and even sacrifice for a brother or sister are emphasized. Sibling bonds endure throughout life; many immigrant adults live with a brother or a sister temporarily or more permanently.

Sibling Loyalty Gone Awry

Can there be too much sibling loyalty? In an interesting study Lobato et al. (2012) found that in impoverished conditions, siblings of children with developmental disabilities, such as Down syndrome or autism, were at risk for school attendance issues, low academic performance, separation anxiety, and agoraphobia. These risks could be attributed in part to stressors such as obligations to translate at medical appointments and other family caretaking responsibilities. But most compelling for practice considerations was that these Latino children were most reluctant to express any negative experiences or feelings they had due to their sibling's disability. It is unclear whether the parents instruct them to be silent or whether their sibling loyalty is so strong that it would feel like a betrayal to be anything other than self-sacrificing and family-centric.

Another example of excessive sibling loyalty was evident when a woman, badly battered by her husband, appealed to his brothers—only to be rebuffed and shunned by them under the guise that she must be lying because "my brother could not do anything like that." Other family members also sided with the perpetrator, leaving the wife as an unprotected outsider.

The Influence of Birth Order

Parents accord clear authority to older siblings and usually delegate some supervisory and caretaking functions to them. In large families, complex allocations of roles, division of labor, and individual compatibilities stimulate the formation of subgroups. Traditional gender role assignment encourages girls to do household chores for the boys, who in turn are supposed to chaperone and protect their sisters outside the home. In the humorous novel *Estrella's Quinceañera*, the supervision of the protagonist is frequently entrusted to her two incompetent brothers (Alegría, 2006).

Older siblings may teach early literacy skills, such as reading and writing, during pretend play and didactic interactions with their younger siblings (Obregon, 2012). The behavior of siblings affects other siblings in multiple ways. For example, younger siblings of pregnant Mexican American teens report that their sister's childbearing has affected them greatly. It has increased family stress and conflict, but they also felt that this experience has brought them closer to their older sister and has engendered a great deal of love for the sister's baby (East et al., 2011).

Continued emotional support, advice, and practical help among adult siblings are tributes to the enduring connectedness of family ties among Latinos. Nevertheless, quarrels and resentment among adult siblings are also common. These may occur because younger siblings attempt

a more egalitarian relationship, but older siblings may continue to press their birth order or age hierarchy. Sibling quarrels may also be caused by parental favoritism, disagreements about inheritance, or unpaid debts. Rifts among siblings, however, are seldom permanent. New family transitions often serve as points of reunion and pathways to rejuvenate brother and sister ties.

Sibling Therapy as Practice Resource

The strength of the sibling bond provides a rich therapeutic resource when parents are absent or not available due to incarceration, drug usage, or mental illness. This bond can also be part of an effective method of cultural-generational mediation in family therapy. The therapist can first interview the parents separately, then the siblings, and later bring the whole family together for a feedback session. In separate interviews, siblings can negotiate issues they might not bring up with their parents present. Or their cooperation may be enlisted to extricate an overprotected or a parentified child from the parental subsystem. As a separate modality, sibling therapy alone provides a good alternative when conventional family therapy is difficult or impossible—a frequent dilemma when family members are separated or disrupted because of migration, economics, incarceration, or other struggles of poverty.

THE ROBLEDO BROTHERS: "CAN SNIFFING GLUE TURN YOUR BRAINS INTO MASHED POTATOES?"

One of my first cases of sibling therapy was with the Robledo brothers: Gilberto (age 13), Rafael (11), and Chui (9). These three Puerto Rican boys were inhaling airplane glue together to get high. After numerous failed attempts to engage their mother, grandmother, or any other adults at home, we resorted to asking the boys' probation officer to bring whomever he could get. He came in with the three boys. With my cotherapist, an American man in his mid-30s who had learned Spanish in the Peace Corps, we spent the first two sessions building trust, discovering the individuality of each youngster, and understanding their relationships.

We spared them talking about their home situation. Their mother was functionally and emotionally unavailable—engaged in drug abuse and prostitution. Their daily home life, neighborhood, and school seemed dismal; they could not verbalize any strengths or home triumphs. We turned then to talking about language and the various accents we all had; we each tried to imitate our various accents; they made fun of my slower way of talking and I, in turn, imitated how I heard the speed of their speech—and we all imitated the

stiffness of John's gringo language struggles. With this playfulness we could move to talking about our ethnicities and countries of origin, and then what it meant for each one of them to be Puerto Rican in Chicago. John and I talked about our own ethnicities, gender, race, migrations, our sibling group, and birth order, about the good things and the bad things in these categories and experiences. We were friendly, genuine, and even shared some of our own questionable youthful experiences, the fun of it as well as the trouble it got us.

The five of us managed to feel a little closer to each other and were able to diffuse the hierarchies and the differences somewhat, but inevitably they were there. And so John and I decided to face the three youngsters as squarely as we could, by talking about our differences. We started with our differences in age, race, and gender. John and I stepped out of our roles as therapists briefly and talked about our roles as parents, in contrast to the boys' roles as children. I mentioned that I was a rather strict parent who did not like it when my children sidestepped their obligations to themselves, such as when they watched TV before doing their homework. Somewhat in jest I confessed that I went around telling my children that if they watched too much TV, their brains would turn into mashed potatoes (my daughters can attest that yes, indeed, I warned them often about these effects of TV watching!). The roaring, cracking, writhing laughter that followed went on and on until Gilberto intervened forcefully saying, "Yeah! Hey, hey!! Listen listen listen to this: Can the stuff [airplane glue] turn your brains into mashed potatoes? Can it, can it? Hey, tell the truth, the truth!" We said we thought it could. And most amazing was the fact that they seemed to believe us.

In the remarkable process that followed, Gilberto, the oldest sibling, became inspired to be almost primitively controlling of himself and his younger siblings. He instituted a system of surveillance and organized each brother to become "a cop" for the other, in a fashion reminiscent of William Golding's Ralph in *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954). Anyone going near a hardware store or a parking lot was punished by the other two. Once, when Rafael and Chui teamed up and violated both rules, Gilberto abandoned them in the streets, did not talk to them for days, and came to a session by himself.

Gilberto taught me about the power of sibling love and leadership when adults cannot nurture or control, but he also taught me about the human wish to care and be cared for, whatever it takes.

The influential position of an older sibling, particularly with his or her immigrant parents, can be used to help a less favored or scapegoated sibling. In the case that follows, an older brother's intervention, by virtue of his power as the oldest and his male gender, alleviated an interdependent, conflict-ridden relationship between his mother and his younger sister.

MARGARITA'S OLDEST BROTHER AND HER CONFESSION

Soon after Margarita's mother and children joined her and her oldest married brother in San Diego, the young Guatemalan mother found herself struggling with the consequences of years of estrangement from her mother and children. Margarita was especially distressed by her ambivalence toward her mother, Carmen. She felt gratitude over the crucial role Carmen played in taking care of her children while Margarita sought a better life in the U.S. But Carmen had always been critical of her daughter's lifestyle and her relationships with young women and men. *Respeto* had stopped Margarita from answering back until she couldn't take it anymore and exploded in anger and threatened to leave her mother and children again.

Gender issues played a definite role in that Carmen relied on and respected the opinions of her sons, particularly the oldest, Juan Alberto, whereas she treated Margarita as a second-class citizen. I suggested that they bring Juan Alberto to the session, but Margarita worried that he would just go along with her chastising out of respect for his mother. I thought of a sibling interview, and Margarita agreed with the idea of enlisting her brother's help.

Juan Alberto's input was enlightening. He was very supportive of Margarita, had a lot of empathy for her predicament, and offered his own perspective by telling her a family secret. Juan Alberto's theory was that Carmen's pressure on Margarita over issues such as a woman's honor and reputation stemmed from her own shame regarding what Juan Alberto called her own "questionable past." There were many indications that, during her youth, Carmen had worked as a barmaid and prostitute in a tiny Guatemalan town. Apparently, one of Margarita and Juan Alberto's half-siblings had died of an acute infectious disease in his adolescence. Juan Alberto believed that their mother interpreted this death as punishment for her own "low life," and that's why she returned so intensely to the Roman Catholicism of her childhood. Thus Juan Alberto attempted to dispel Margarita's anguish over her mother's accusations by shifting the blame toward their mother's own difficult past life. He also promised that he would talk to their mother about relaxing controls and criticisms, and stressing instead all the good things to honor about Margarita's hard work and accomplishments in the U.S.

But the story didn't end there. Two weeks after that sibling session, Margarita asked to see me alone. She started by telling me that she believed the story Juan Alberto had told—she now vaguely recollected hearing rumors about their mother's past. But Margarita's main fear was that perhaps Juan Alberto also meant the story about her mother's past as *indirectas*—that is, as an indirect communication toward her. Margarita started weeping, pouring forth a confession about her own involvement in prostitution.[2] In fact, she never could have paid for the airplane tickets to the border, the "coyote" (smuggler) who crossed them through, or the rent for their apartment had she not supplemented her meager salary with prostitution. I will never know if the brother really knew, or just suspected, these events in Margarita's life, but the type of indirect communication, by allusion, is not atypical of a preferred cultural communication style that avoids direct confrontation.

Adult sibling therapy is helpful in (1) addressing, in a more balanced manner, old, rigid ledgers and loyalties from the family of origin; (2) gathering siblings together to help resolve serious issues between the parents and the identified patient; and (3) raising issues that the parents are unable to address, such as we have seen in the Moreno Carrillo family, with its 16-member sibling group, in Chapter 7.

COMMUNICATION STYLES, CONFLICT AVOIDANCE, AND POSITIVE EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

Ideologies about connectedness and hierarchies, as reflected in the values of *familismo* and *respeto*, may significantly shape the Latino family's style of communication, conflict management, and emotional expression—three areas that receive frequent attention by clinicians. This section explores some of the nuances of Latino communication and their implications for the work of practitioners. An extensive case study demonstrates how interactional styles affect family functioning and illustrates specific culturally congruent clinical practices.

Language and Politeness

The *amabilidad* (amiability), gentility, and civility of the Spanish language no doubt contribute to a politeness of demeanor, deportment, and address. The Mexican American writer Sandra Cisneros (2002) offers a sharp contrast between these pleasing forms and the direct, business-like messages conveyed by the English language, which sound so painfully inhuman to her father's ears:

> Because Uncle Fat-Face had been in the United States longer he gave Father advice. Look, when speaking to police always begin with, "Hello, my friend."
>
> In order to advance in society, Father thought it wise to memorize several passages from the "Polite Phrases" chapter. *I congratulate you. Pass on, sir. Pardon my English. I have no answer to give you. It gives me the greatest pleasure. And–I am of the same opinion.*
>
> But his English was odd to American ears. He worked at his pronunciation and tried his best to enunciate correctly. *Sir, kindly direct*

> *me to the water closet. . . . Please what do you say? May I trouble you to ask for what time is? Do me the kindness to tell me how is.* When all else failed and Father couldn't make himself understood, he could resort to—*Spic Spanish?*
>
> *Qué* strange was English. Rude and to the point. No one preceded a request with a—*Will you not be so kind as to do me the favor of . . .* ?–as one ought. They just asked. Nor did they add—*If God wills it*—to their plans, as if they were in audacious control of their own destiny. It was a barbarous language. Curt as the commands of a dog-trainer. *"Sit." "Speak up."* And why did no one say *"You are welcome."* Instead they grunted—*"Uh-huh"* without looking him in the eye, and without so much as a *"You are very kind, mister, and may things go well for you."* (p. 70)[3]

From early on, in spite of national variations many Latinos, like Cisneros's father, are raised with the notion that much can be achieved interpersonally if people talk nicely, explain a lot, are not confrontational, and if possible, give compliments.

Harmony and Humor: *Indirectas, Choteo,* and *Dichos*

In keeping with their desire to preserve family harmony and avoid interpersonal conflict, collectivistic cultures favor indirect, implicit, and covert or humorous communications. People publicly agree—or at least do not disagree—with each other in order to "get along" and not make others uncomfortable—yes, the latter is important. Conversely, assertiveness, open differences of opinion, and direct demands for clarification are seen as rude or insensitive to others' feelings. Feelings of anger and disappointment seem fairly universal; what changes is how they are expressed. One can speculate that this style of communication may be more prevalent in the impoverished and subordinated social classes toward the more affluent, but in general terms, as in the quote by Sandra Cisneros, the expectation of politeness and indirectness seems to be a cultural preference.

The use of impersonal third-person rather than first-person pronouns is one aspect of this style. For example, by stating "One could be proud of . . . " rather than "I am proud of . . . " the person is viewed as appropriately subtle, selfless, and *bien educado* or having good manners (see Chapter 12). The use of allusions, proverbs, sayings, and parables to convey an opinion is commonplace, especially among Mexicans and many Central and South Americans. Cubans seem more adept than Mexicans and Puerto Ricans at directness, softened by a mordant, piquant, and sometimes even outrageous sense of humor. The result of all this is an apparent harmony, occasionally at the expense of a clear understanding of the other's intent. *Indirectas* or allusions without reaching confrontation

are also used to maintain harmony when the negative emotion at hand is irritation or anger. A Mexican saying states, "The one who gets angry loses." So criticisms often take the form of allusion (e.g., "Some people never change"), diminutives used in a sarcastic way, and belittlement. Similarly, Cubans use *choteo* (humor) as a way of ridiculing or making fun of people, situations, or things. *Choteo* may involve exaggerations, jokes, or satire to modify tense situations. *Dichos* or proverbs are sayings that encapsulate wisdom, timeless life observations, or comments about the human condition.

Harmony is also maintained by engaging in "light" triangles. Alliances, especially when based on gender rapport, provide an emotional outlet in the form of gossip and secrets. These may not necessarily be detrimental, as clinicians are often trained to think, because light triangles may at times deflect attention from petty annoyances and enhance the stability of family relationships (Falicov, 1998).

Words of endearment and compliments about a person's appearance, dress, or smile provide support for a friend or a family member's positive qualities. Indeed, warmth flows from these positive verbal expressions and from physical proximity and gestures. As mentioned previously, a couch in my office that accommodates only one European American parent and one child comfortably seats one or two Latino parents with two or three children, who make liberal use of laps! Touching, kissing, and hugging happen spontaneously, particularly between Latino parents and children. But they extend to other friendly relationships too—in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia, teachers kiss pupils, hairdressers kiss their clients, and children kiss the parents of their friends without any hesitation.

IMPLICATIONS OF COMMUNICATION STYLES FOR PRACTICE

The Latino culture's emphasis on smooth relationships, social graces, and *personalismo* (building personal relationships) has significant implications for family clinical practice. On occasion, communication styles that emphasize indirectness and civility in the name of avoiding conflict can become excessive and lead to concealment, lies, and intrigues. At other times they may provide veiled messages sent on circuitous ways. Distinguishing the degree to which such patterns of indirect communication are simply cultural styles or reflect problems of a particular family is part of the clinician's exploration with the family. Earlier in this chapter, we considered the distinction between cultural styles and cultural masks as

one way to disentangle these issues. Interestingly, in Frank Jr.'s case, a saying was used by the family to describe what happened to the couple when Frank Jr. was born. The saying was "the apple of the discord was planted"—a clue to a process that differed from a cultural expectation. In general terms, staying within the culturally preferred modes of relating ensures the formation of a better working relationship and the availability of many avenues for therapeutic practices, as we discuss next.

The Clinician's Attention to Communication Style

An initial social phase that transmits the practitioner's interest in the family members is best. Even if attention to referral sheets or records is necessary, this can be done in a friendly, engaged, and interactive manner from the beginning. Manifesting real interest in the client's life details, his or her theory about why the problem exists, and the attempted solutions is critical, given the Latino emphasis on *personalismo*. A tone of acceptance and patience that avoids confrontation is advisable. I have, on occasion, abruptly interrupted a family member who was monopolizing a session or called someone on an inconsiderate behavior rather than finding a more indirect form of addressing the issues. Although I had thought that the therapeutic alliance was well established, the consequences of my directness were negative.

An intense emotive style and person-centered approach appear to be more appealing than a businesslike, structured, or task-oriented approach. Latinos seem to respond more openly when feelings are subtly elicited than when they are directly asked to describe or explain their emotions and reactions. An experiential approach that emphasizes "telling it like it is" or "baring one's soul" and interpreting nonverbal language may well inhibit clients.

Of course, a clinician must not impose, out of presumed "cultural attunement," a particular style of relating regardless of how the family presents itself, so these general guidelines only apply if the observations warrant it. Although contracts and behavioral treatment goals might be too task-oriented—most Latinos would not be comfortable scheduling certain times to be intimate or to resolve problems—the clinician can assign "conditional homework," perhaps asking the family to think about how it would feel to engage in a particular task should the occasion arise. Such a technique is not only more collaborative and less presumptive, but it is also consonant with a culture that values serendipity, chance, and spontaneity in interpersonal relationships.

Whatever the theoretical orientation or type of practice, it is advisable for practitioners to invite the family's feedback about the process.

In a culture that emphasizes cooperation and respect for authority, clients may feel that it is impolite to openly disagree with the practitioners. Encouraging the family to express both their positive and negative reactions to the professional's opinions helps to establish a tone of mutuality and gives an opportunity for feedback to clients that might otherwise not take the initiative out of politeness.

The Use of Stories, Humor, Allusions, Metaphors, Sayings, and Diminutives

As a relationship develops between practitioner and client, the practitioner's use of humor, allusions, and diminutives softens the directness of treatment and are often more effective forms of delivery because they mirror preferred cultural interactional styles. Disclosure can be facilitated when the practitioner becomes a philosopher of life through storytelling, anecdotes, and metaphors. Use of analogies, proverbs, aphorisms, fables, or sayings as mysterious or unexpected communications that transmit an existential sense of the absurd or the reversals of life fits with cultural themes.

The use of proverbs is common in many cultures and perhaps particularly more so in traditional and rural cultures. It may also be the case that the use of proverbs is further reinforced in groups that attend church services, since sermons often expand on the thinking encapsulated or evoked by Christian proverbs. Many Latinos are adept with these metaphorical or poetic statements. They call them *proverbios, refranes, aforismos*, or *dichos* depending on the country of origin.

A therapist's knowledge and timely use of *dichos* (proverbs or sayings) is a valuable and aesthetic communicational resource (Zuniga, 1992; Bracero, 1998). Clients are likely to remember, chuckle about, and ponder something said via this medium. In the couple or family therapy situation, I sometimes find it helpful to say something indirectly to a family member via a proverb rather than in a more direct or confrontational way. Often, that person is able to hear the message and not feel threatened or "uncovered" in front of others, who may or may not understand to what the proverb refers. In the case of Aldrete Mujia illustrated later in this chapter, I use the Christian proverb "Let he [she] who is without sin cast the first stone" to send an indirect or veiled message to the adolescent daughter about her double standard regarding transparency.

Being Argentine, I know a good number of *dichos*, so sometimes I tell clients that if we were in Argentina I might use such-and-such proverb—do they have anything similar for this situation in Costa Rica? And I always learn. For example, one time I said to Mexican parents: "If parents cannot

agree on how to raise their kids, the kids can ignore parents and go on doing what they want. Do you have a saying for that situation?" Immediately I got this response: "*A río revuelto, ganancia de pescador*" (When the river water is agitated, the fishermen win). From then on, these parents used the saying many times to help them become more united, so I have used this saying with other parents or with mothers and grandmothers in conflict over raising children.

Clients can be asked if family or friends have a saying that would help in circumstances or experiences such as the ones they are undergoing. Santiago-Rivera et al. (2002) provide a nice example of asking clients for the proverbs that help them. The therapist asked a Bolivian woman who suffered from discrimination and oppression if she had a *dicho* that helped her cope. The client answered "*El oro brilla hasta en el basurero*" (Gold can shine even in a garbage can). Asking clients for their own proverbs has the merit of not assuming that they would understand or respond to any proverb or that their meanings would be similar to the therapist's. In a delightful way, Santiago-Rivera et al. (2002) use a *dicho* to introduce each chapter of their book about counseling Latinos.

Many sayings, such as the one by the Bolivian woman, convey strengths and a resilient response to adversity. Consider, for example, "*Dios aprieta, pero no ahorca*" (God squeezes you, but he does not strangle you), and "*No hay mal que por bien no venga*" (There is no evil from which some good cannot come). Proverbs or *dichos* also provide opportunities to express human contradictions or inconsistencies. For example, a protective attitude toward finding out something painful is conveyed by the saying "*Ojos que no ven, corazon que no siente*" (When you do not see something, your heart will not suffer), but in the same breath, the opposite can be expressed: "*Ojos que ven, no envejecen*" (Eyes that see do not grow old). One must not assume meanings without inquiring in each case, to understand better what a client may mean by using a particular proverb, as the meanings are nuanced when applied to the particular case.

Some of the attitudes conveyed in the sayings above have been interpreted in a deficit framework as fatalism or resignation and implying an external locus of control over one's destiny. This negative evaluation overlooks the wisdom and resilience of accepting situations that cannot be changed or the hope that comes from faith when life circumstances are trying. (For further discussion of fatalism, see Chapter 7, pp. 212–213.)

Many of these proverbs are similar across Spanish speakers, but others vary or exist only in their particular countries of origin. A book by Zona (1996) states the countries of origin of each proverb. It is a cultural resource that can be strategically placed in the waiting room, for example, as well as in group support or therapy meetings so that proverbs can be selected for discussions. Nava's book *It Is All in the Frijoles* (2000) is another easy and fun reference for folktales, stories, and *dichos* that can be used for all age groups.

Generational and Gender Clashes

The tendency to maintain harmony and avoid conflict in a large, complex family network may be less sustainable for adolescents or young adults raised in the U.S. who may challenge parents to become more "modern" (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). The following case illustrates these issues and offers helpful practice ideas for dealing with large families that live in collectivistic, extended family settings.

THE ALDRETE MUJÍAS: "LET SHE WHO IS WITHOUT SIN CAST THE FIRST STONE"

The Aldrete Mujías were a traditional, middle-class, business-oriented, Catholic family, living in a conservative, white neighborhood of San Diego. The nuclear group consisted of mother, Marta (age 35); father, Robert (36); and four children, Jennifer (14), Andrew (13), Chris (9), and Silvina (5). Two very large extended families lived close by. Robert was the first son and the second of eight siblings, all of whom lived with their spouses. Many of the spouses also had extended family nearby. Robert's mother, Dolores Aldrete, lived eight blocks away from him in a home that was the hub of many family activities. For years Robert, Marta, and the children had enjoyed *la comida semanal* (an extended family weekly meal ritual) and a game of lotto (*lotería*) at Dolores's house every Sunday afternoon (see Figure 10.1).

Marta Aldrete Mujía was the third of seven siblings. Her mother, Lourdes, had a wonderful, large home two blocks away, where the grown children and the grandchildren spent many weekends. The house grounds became a recreational camp for the grandchildren every summer. Both Robert's and Marta's families of origin had a steady Catholic church affiliation and celebrated all religious holidays and birthdays together.

During the first nuclear family interview I learned that Jennifer had been living with Abuelita (Grandma) Dolores for the past 3 weeks, following a particularly nasty row with her mother, Marta. In fact, Jennifer had been fighting constantly with Marta, spreading the news on both sides of the family that she despised her and would never respect her again. Marta felt hurt, embarrassed, and afraid of the public opinion of both families, the neighbors, and the school, all of whom were aware that Jennifer had gone to live at Abuelita Dolores's house.

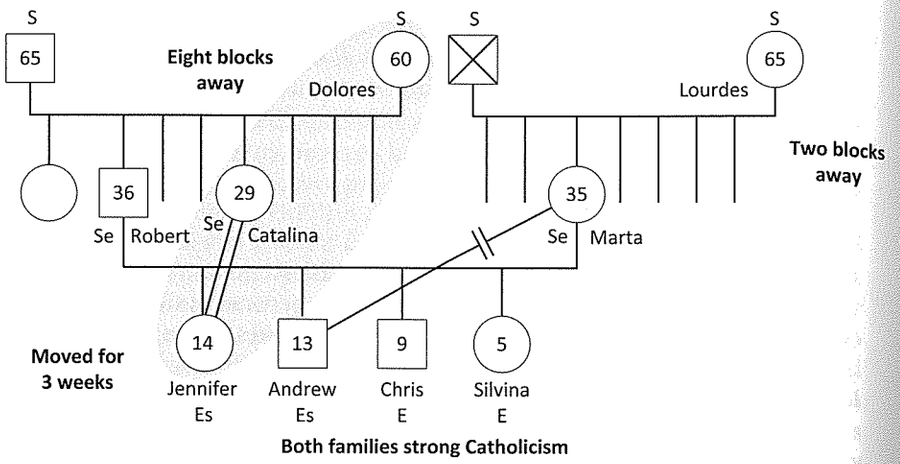

FIGURE 10.1. The Aldrete Mujía family genogram.

Robert, though passive and uninvolved, completely supported his wife Marta. He was equally tired of Jennifer's willfulness, demands for privileges such as getting car rides to visit friends, and sassy retorts when her wishes were not granted immediately. There seemed to be a peer-like relationship between Jennifer and her mother rather than a hierarchical relationship involving parental respect. Instead, the two grandmothers were the executive subsystem of the family.

Because so many people were involved, piecing together a coherent story was as fascinating as it was frustrating. For example, I learned from Jennifer that Marta had shoved her lightly once or twice during their squabbles, and that unbeknown to her parents, Jennifer had sought revenge by reporting her mother to the school counselor. However, feeling confused by the school's strong reaction, she begged school authorities not to report her mother to CPS, so the school decided to maintain close observations and regular meetings with Jennifer until they understood the situation better. Building my therapeutic alliance with Jennifer also required that I keep this secret confidential, at least temporarily.

Meanwhile, Jennifer, who had all the entitlements that come from being the first and favorite grandchild in two large extended Latino families, had secured a lot of sympathetic supporters among her paternal uncles, aunts, and cousins, who had subtly shunned Marta by not calling her or asking how she was doing after Jennifer had moved to the grandmother's house. Marta was mortified. She felt that years of hard work had vanished and her reputation as a mother was tarnished forever. She feared the family's judgment

and stopped the Sunday meals with Abuelita Dolores. She was losing her old terrain as Jennifer invaded it. Meanwhile, Jennifer was getting situated with the paternal grandmother, Dolores, and a paternal, single aunt, Tía (Aunt) Catalina (29), who was living with her mother while between jobs.

PRACTICE IDEAS FOR THE ALDRETE MUJÍA FAMILY

Interviewing Extended Family Subsystems—Grandmother and Aunt

I interviewed Abuelita Dolores and Tía Catalina alone. Much to my surprise, Abuelita Dolores seemed to speak with "two sides of her mouth." She catered to every one of Jennifer's wishes, cooked every one of her meals, let her talk for hours on the phone, and had frequent conversations with her in which she criticized Marta with venom, wondering, for example, if her unkemptness and emotionality were connected to Lourdes's (the other grandmother) upbringing of Marta. Yet behind Jennifer's back, Grandma Dolores expressed quite a different opinion. She was critical of how willful, poorly mannered, and inconsiderate Jennifer was. She was even somewhat sympathetic about how difficult it must be for Marta to raise Jennifer. Had the preservation of harmony and indirect communication gone awry or at least too far, I wondered? The intrigues of the extended family and Marta's self-imposed ostracism were escalating and needed attention.

The indirectness of communication can compound the obvious difficulties of assessing many interrelated issues. With large families, practitioners can mobilize information to initiate and monitor a process of change in two ways. One is to convene the entire family network and obtain as many opinions and stories as possible. The use of comparative, circular questioning (Fleuridas et al., 1986) is particularly helpful in this process (e.g., the clinician might ask, "Who is the most concerned about Jennifer's living with *abuelita*?" or "Robert, how does your mother respond when Marta declines invitations for the Sunday *comida*?"). The other method is to select a family member who is more peripheral to the problem than those in the consulting family unit, but central enough that he or she can communicate or "link" with the larger group (Landau-Stanton, 1990). Another way to think about the "link" member is as a symbolic "cotherapist," as illustrated in our continuing case.

Enlisting One Extended Family Member as "Cotherapist" or "Link"

Of all the family members I had met, Tía Catalina impressed me as the most level-headed and psychologically minded. She seemed to have a more balanced and perhaps more bicultural appraisal of the issues between parents and adolescent children and understood the dangers of taking sides. Catalina believed that the family should have gone to counseling a long time ago. She

also felt it was time for her brother, Robert, to be less peripheral to his family and not delegate so much of the parenting to the women. After asking the Aldretes' permission, I invited Catalina to be my cotherapist.

Asking Cotherapist–Extended Family Member to Restore Order

I relied on Catalina to normalize the situation in the extended setting. Her task was to reopen Abuelita Dolores's home for Sunday meals and reestablish routines that had been nurturing for everybody. She also was to encourage Robert to help Marta continue with "life as usual" while Jennifer remained at Grandma's house, rather than create new escalations and polarizations. Remaining calm, clear, and involved would empower Marta and raise her in the hierarchy—these would allow a shift away from her usual responses of excessive civility or angry outbursts.

Working with Parental Subsystem to Empower Them against Alliance of Child and Grandmother

I met with Marta and Robert and encouraged them to become more involved in daily decisions concerning Jennifer. Marta needed to be more effective in providing limits for Jennifer, and for the other children too, before things got out of control. Usually Marta felt overpowered by Jennifer (who had known since childhood that she could always rely on her paternal grandmother's backing). Following a confrontation with Jennifer, Marta usually became ashamed of how she had handled things, feared the larger family's backlash, and either gave in to Jennifer or retreated—only to receive further challenges and contempt from Jennifer. Although Robert appropriately sided with his wife, he had never been aware of how his mother's spoiling of Jennifer undermined Marta's authority. Out of *respeto* and a sense that it was normal for a grandmother to spoil the granddaughter, he had never talked to Abuelita Dolores about this issue. But now, as he and Marta were making plans to bring Jennifer home, he broached the subject. He felt that his family of procreation needed to function as a more bounded nuclear family, while remaining part of an integrated extended network.

Utilizing Older Son's Influence with His Mother

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, often an oldest son may interact with his mother in mutually persuasive ways. It was actually not that difficult for Robert to convince his mother to let go of Jennifer, as the girl had become rather rebellious toward her grandmother's caretaking behaviors. Although careful questioning of Jennifer failed to really clarify her contempt for her mother, she appeared to admire Catalina and me. She often asked me career-related questions and wanted to see the books in my office. She was impressed to see books with my name on the cover.

Interviewing All the Generations of Women about "Women's Culture and Gender Transition"

In a joint session with all the women—Dolores, Marta, Jennifer, Catalina, and myself—I decided to explore "women's issues," focused on cultural and personal conceptions about the meaning of being a woman. Self-possession, calmness, and self-confidence emerged as the qualities Jennifer held in highest esteem for present and future role modeling. She felt that her mother, Marta, who was alternately intimidated and submissive or rageful and irrational, was not to be respected. Catalina proved to be the invaluable bridge—as a woman in cultural transition, she could blend views and values. All of us talked about the pros and cons of traditional and of more modern behavior.

Using a Proverb to Signal Indirectly the Need for Accountability in One Family Member

The contrasts between direct and indirect at communication, including secrets, lies, and duplicity, were brought up. Jennifer was furious at her mother's meekness and insisted on the need for a cultural change toward openness and resolution of conflicts, particularly with the grandmother (she chose not to mention the grandmother's duplicity). And, of course, I was the only one who knew that Jennifer was not above reproach when it came to duplicity and lack of transparency, given her secret denunciation of her mother to the school counselor. I decided to make her more internally accountable by alluding to her own secret revenge indirectly, with the help of a Christian biblical proverb in Spanish that Jennifer understood: "*La que este libre de pecado que tire la primera piedra*" (Let she who is without sin cast the first stone).

Marta, feeling supported in her role as mother by Catalina and me, became self-critical about her own emotional style of dealing with problems, basically agreeing with Jennifer. She also praised Jennifer's desires to be "more than I could accomplish." The changed tone in Marta's voice visibly diminished Jennifer's combativeness and stimulated all of the women to assume a more self-reflective stance and philosophical discussion about culture and generation. Marta was encouraged by all of us to begin to regard herself as a woman in cultural transition, with many opportunities to reinvent herself, both culturally and personally. A process of greater transparency and healing had begun with several women of four generations engaged in constructing positive models of womanhood and types of communication that fit their contexts and historical times.

After the initial isolation of solo immigrants that we discussed in Chapter 3, over time through reunification and growth, there is a plethora

of others from whom to get help in Latinos families, as well as many close and distant relationships that occupy their lives. Clinicians usually know little about the resources provided and the constraints imposed by large nuclear and extended family arrangements unless they regularly engage many of the players in large families.

Yet, it is also important to remember that there may be a price to pay for this help, particularly when these systems of care may preserve harmony by secretiveness. The challenge is to remain constantly aware that a different model of individual development and family relationships may be operating than the conventional European American version, or rather the version promoted in most psychotherapy approaches. The extended family model may be operating even when families are fragmented across countries and undergo frequent expansions and contractions in family membership. The topics I have selected for this chapter—connectedness, the cast of characters with their positions in the family hierarchy, communication, conflict resolution, and emotional expression—are particularly relevant, especially when one considers the degree of consonance or dissonance between the "maps" of the family and those of the practitioner. These are also dimensions of family life in which cultural continuity, cultural change, culture clash—and eventual biculturalism take place.

In the next chapter, family bonds figure highly again, but with an emphasis on couple relationships. Connectedness for couples may take on quite different meanings for Latino spouses who might be in cultural transition from traditional to modern models of couplehood and for whom cultural scripts about gender alter social constructions of marriage, beliefs, and behaviors within intimate relationships.

NOTES

1. From *A Glass of Water* by Jimmy Santiago Baca. Reprinted with permission.

2. Women who live with a boyfriend or a husband may still work in nightclubs as a bargirl or escort. The money helps women who have no income, education, or skills with the economic hardships, but often presents moral dilemmas for the women and tensions with their families, as in Margarita's case. In one of my cases, a Colombian mother who had managed to escape a sexually exploitative relationship in her country amassed significant funds from her work as a solo prostitute in the U.S. to send for her two adolescent sons to join her. Among her motivations for bringing her sons was that the 17-year-old had started a life of prostitution himself in the streets of Bogotá. After they arrived, a faith-based group helped her leave her occupation and concentrate on job training and spiritual renewal.

3. From *Caramelo*. Copyright 2002 by Sandra Cisneros. Published by Vintage Books in paperback in 2003 and originally in hardcover by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. By permission of Susan Bergholz Literary Services, New York, NY, and Lamy, NM. All rights reserved.