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female altruism reconsidered: the Virgin Mary as economic woman

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This paper compares variations in adult female role behavior among two different groups of working-class Latin American women, one resident in Cali, Colombia, the other in San Francisco, California. For the purposes of the discussion, *Caleñas* will refer to the Colombian women and *Latinas* to the San Francisco women. Using ethnographic and other published sources, we first describe the conventionally accepted dimensions of the Latin American wife-mother role and outline the normative expectations for appropriate conjugal-maternal behavior as they have been presented in the literature. We show that this role has been portrayed by investigators as an unchanging construct despite the variety of socioeconomic settings in which it is found. We next consider the economic and social resources available to working-class Latin American women in Cali and San Francisco and describe how women use these resources within the context of the conjugal-maternal role to meet their basic needs, to demonstrate that differences in the types of resources available to women in the two settings shape the way in which this role complex is performed by the two groups.

In both cities, women face restricted access to employment and must meet subsistence needs through relationships with others. In Cali, mothers have few alternatives other than to rely on men for subsistence, and *Caleñas* use their femininity and sexuality in efforts to establish what they wish to be permanent conjugal unions. Latina mothers also generally rely on husbands to meet subsistence needs, but in contrast to the *Caleñas*, Latinas can and do seek public assistance in the event their conjugal relationships prove unreliable or unstable. Freed of the worry of satisfying immediate needs, Latinas on welfare devote

Standard ethnographic descriptions of Latin American women indicate that the wife-mother role complex is a uniform entity despite the variety of socioeconomic settings in which it is found. Data collected in Cali, Colombia, and San Francisco, California, suggest clear differences in the way working-class Latin American women perform this common role. Caleñas emphasize the dimension of wife and the importance of conjugal affiliation; they pay relatively less attention to ties with children. By contrast, San Francisco Latinas devote themselves to the maternal role and consider relations with husbands to be of secondary significance. These differences will be shown to arise from varying economic and social conditions present in the two settings. [motherhood, women's roles, economic strategies, Colombia, Latino immigrants, urban anthropology]

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themselves to building intense ties with their offspring, who they hope will care for them later in life. Unlike *Caleñas*, Latinas place little emphasis on conjugal affiliation but instead adopt a stance of self-abnegating martyrdom in efforts to cement bonds with their children.

Our interpretation of *Caleña* and Latina role complexes differs from that of other investigators of Latin American culture who see social roles as the determinant of behavior. In the analysis that follows, we show that while a role may provide parameters to limit the range of possible action, human beings themselves, in response to external circumstances, determine how a role is actually performed. The variations described here suggest that the Latin American wife-mother role complex is less uniform than has previously been assumed. These variations illustrate how a unitary construct such as "woman's role" changes in response to varying economic and social conditions.

gender role differentiation: Latin style

Analytical descriptions of Latin American women have attributed observed behavioral characteristics to a well-developed ideology and practice based on sexual differentiation. In these formulations, masculinity and femininity are viewed as diametrically opposed. Each gender is said to have a clearly specified set of intrinsic characteristics derived from biological and temperamental differences that are intensified through the socialization process. *Machismo*, the cultural elaboration of the masculine role, has been the subject of detailed attention by social scientists and other commentators (Back and Hass 1973; Stevens 1973; Williamson 1970; Paz 1961). The term essentially refers to a cult of virility, characterized by "exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships" (Stevens 1973:90). The emphasis on sexual conquest comes from its function as symbolic male dominance which must be reinforced through periodic demonstrations of virility. Excessive drinking, violent behavior, and other types of risk taking are also intrinsic qualities of the *machista*.

As the male embodies the active and aggressive principles, the essential female qualities are said to be attributes related to submissiveness and self-denial. Octavio Paz (1961:37), poet and essayist, states this in a lyrical way when he writes:

The Mexican woman quite simply has no will of her own. Her body is asleep and only becomes really alive when someone awakens her. She is an answer rather than a question, a vibrant and easily worked material that is shaped by the imagination and sensuality of the male.

In theory, female passivity provides women with valued rewards of spiritual superiority. Moral purity, obtained through demonstrations of maternal selflessness, is said to compensate for the inability to act purposefully, to openly seek pleasure and personal gratification.

In its most elevated form, female altruism emerges as the ideology of *Marianismo*, involving elaboration of those qualities that mark the special veneration of the Virgin Mary and promoting a doctrine of female spiritual superiority. "This spiritual strength engenders abnegation, that is, an infinite capacity for humility and sacrifice. No self-denial is too great for the Latin American woman, no limit can be divined to her vast store of patience with the men of her world" (Stevens 1973:94-95). Paz (1961:36) writes, "She should be 'decent' in the face of erotic excitements and 'longsuffering' in the face of adversity." Aggressiveness and the exercise of self-interest are associated with the comportment of the *mala mujer* (bad woman). The good woman lives not for herself but for the sake of her husband and children. No personal sacrifice on their behalf is excessive; she responds to their needs with passivity and patience, with limitless, enduring self-denial. In return, she receives, rather than wins, their love.

While other investigators have more recently constructed the female role in more active and assertive terms, the axis remains the maternal theme:

The "saint-mother" preserves the family as a strong, united institution; she keeps alive traditions, preserves memories dear to the heart, encourages everything that strengthens family unity, rejects everything that might threaten to weaken it. She is, as it were, the family priestess, who watches over the life of its members from the cradle to the grave (Jacquette 1973:19).

Again, in this newer formulation, maternal altruism lies at the heart of the woman's role. Personal fulfillment can only be achieved through satisfying the needs of others; creative attempts to accomplish this goal provide the only appropriate avenue for self-expression for Latin American women.

In contrast to this extensive literature on the maternal role, that of wife has received considerably less attention, due in part to a general deemphasis of the importance of conjugal interaction in Latin culture and the sexually segregated nature of most social activities. When mentioned at all, the ideal wife is characterized by ethnographers as having the same qualities as those of the ideal mother: selflessness, moral purity, and single-minded dedication (Foster 1967; Lewis 1963; Rubel 1966). Expectations regarding sexual behavior exemplify this. Women are said to have no sexual needs or, at most, weak ones that express themselves only at male initiative. Although they are expected to be unfailingly receptive to their husbands' sexual advances, women who themselves are sexually expressive are reputed to be dangerous, immoral, or insane (Lewis 1963; Shedlin and Hollerbach 1978).

Our research¹ suggests that these interpretations of Latin American women's behavior suffer from oversimplification and from investigators' failure to consider the material bases of manifest behavior. The data that follow show that Latin American women in Cali and San Francisco, while socialized within a common cultural framework, in fact perform different versions of the wife-mother role. Self-sacrifice, Marian purity, and infinite patience are not ends in themselves but rather means by which some women gain valued economic and social rewards. Others, however, find that expressing Marian traits would jeopardize their ability to devise effective strategies to meet subsistence needs. Instead they invoke an assertive, self-centered stance as they search for similar rewards.

We characterize these different behavioral emphases as *strategies*, following Whitten and Whitten (1972:255); we define a strategy as a pattern formed by the many separate, specific behaviors people devise to attain and use resources and to solve the immediate problems confronting them. It represents a choice made by an individual, not necessarily consciously, between various options or competing ways of achieving satisfaction with respect to some external or internal exigency or constraint. For the purposes of this discussion, we make the further distinction between short- and long-term strategies. We will show that the women's behaviors were generated with both short- and long-range outcomes in mind. However, while the two groups of women employed somewhat different domestic strategies in their attempts to meet both present and future needs, short-term success did not necessarily guarantee long-term security for either group. In other words, we use the concept of strategy more by way of analogy than to indicate intentionality or perfect knowledge on the part of the women.

The two emphases to be described develop from similar cultural foundations, involve articulation of similar maternal and conjugal roles, and arise both in response to general economic scarcity and to women's indirect access to the marketplace. However, because the limited opportunities available in the two settings differentially reward performance of the roles of wife and mother, women in Cali and in San Francisco have evolved distinctive styles of female role behavior. San Francisco Latinas have continued to rely on the traditional cultural themes of self-sacrifice, altruism, and the emulation of the Virgin Mary as

the model of exemplary womanhood. By contrast, *Caleñas* have developed an adaptation that demands a more explicit search for personal rewards. Their emphasis on the conjugal role is not enhanced by a Marian stance; rather, success at capturing and sustaining the support of a man requires a distinctly less demure demeanor.

economic opportunities for Latinas and *Caleñas*

San Francisco's Mission District, established in 1776, is now a residential and industrial neighborhood with a low-income, predominantly Latin population, many of whom are recent immigrants. Cali, Colombia's third largest city, has in recent years experienced one of Latin America's highest rates of urban growth. Despite profound and obvious differences in the economic and social structures of the United States and Colombia, the two study groups operate within very similar socioeconomic constraints. In Cali, most female workers are employed in nonpermanent jobs outside the relatively small industrial sector as domestics, commercial cleaning women, waitresses, or prostitutes. Although some of the immigrants to the San Francisco Mission were skilled workers in their native countries, they rarely move into similar positions once they arrive in San Francisco. Like most *Caleñas*, if they work outside their homes, they find employment in the service sector of the economy where jobs are low paying and rarely provide any security.

In addition to the structural features that limit economic opportunities for working- and lower-class women in the two cities, a variety of sociocultural features handicap them in their search for employment. Many husbands object to their wives working for a cash income because they fear it will undermine their own dominance in domestic decision making. In the words of one husband, "When men pay for everything, they can have things the way they want them. But once a woman has her own job and her own money, she begins to feel like more than just a woman, and she starts to make demands and want things too." Many of the men interviewed indicated they would rather sacrifice needed income than give up their unchallenged domestic authority. Women with children who seek jobs also find it hard to arrange for child care. Cali has few facilities of any kind and those in San Francisco are expensive or difficult to gain a place in. In addition, relatives in both cities are usually unable or unwilling to engage in anything other than an occasional child-care commitment. The examples of Alicia² in Cali, who was forced to stop work as a night janitress when she became pregnant with her fifth child, or Luz Alba in San Francisco, who was unable to enter a sales training program because she could not arrange for child care, are illustrations of the difficulties mothers face in finding or keeping a permanent job.

One important difference in the economic situations of the two groups of women lies in the availability in San Francisco of public assistance for needy families with young children. Four of the 11 key informants in San Francisco made use of this alternative at the time of the study, 4 others had used it in the past, and the remaining 3 were generally familiar with the regulations concerning eligibility. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) provides eligible families with monthly subsistence stipends that do not lift them out of the poverty sector. However, when the additional benefits of AFDC, such as food stamps and medical insurance, are also considered, AFDC's level of support approaches the income of many working male or female Latin immigrants. In Cali, on the other hand, there is no similar form of public assistance. There, working mothers are particularly handicapped since jobs as live-in domestic servants, one of the largest sources of female employment, usually require that a woman be childless. Maids are legally obligated to report their pregnancy status to prospective employers; to falsely report that one is not pregnant is legitimate grounds for dismissal.

For mothers in both cities who do manage to obtain paid employment, integrating child

care and other domestic tasks with a job presents serious obstacles to their ability to remain employed. For example, both María Isabel and her sister Pilar, in the San Francisco Mission, worked for a time in a large clothing factory in the neighborhood. Although they found the work hard, with intense pressure to produce because of the piece-work system, both declared themselves to be *encantada* (enchanted) with the job. Time, however, eroded this blissful image. Pilar's payments to her neighbor for the care of her four children left her with little other disposable income. In María Isabel's case, her husband worked at night as a janitor and was able to stay home with the children while she worked. Although they needed the income she provided, he came to resent what he viewed as an intrusion on his personal freedom, and eventually he insisted that she quit the job. While the majority of women in both study groups view paid employment as preferable to total economic dependence, a variety of structural factors impede their ability to implement this goal.

views on marriage and children

In the previous section we discussed the nature of the economic resources available to the women in San Francisco and Cali and the barriers that restrict their full economic participation. In this section we describe their views of themselves as women and their goals as mothers and wives, attitudes that form a context within which they evaluate their economic alternatives. Following this, we show how the interactions of concrete material pressures with these ideological patterns contribute to the development of Latinas' specific short- and long-term strategies in the two cultural settings.

The women in both the San Francisco and Cali study populations voice suspicions about the reliability of men as a group, and they see their own chances for achieving a secure and happy marriage as only a remote possibility. Many refer to marriage as a lottery; "winning" a reliable husband is a chance proposition. One informant put it bluntly when she said, *Nadie sabe quién ganará la lotería de matrimonio* (lit., "No one knows who will win the marriage sweepstakes"). In both cities, the women attribute the universal instability of marriage to the shortcomings of men. They consider their men to be "naturally" less committed to long-term conjugal relationships, either because of men's stronger sexual appetites or because their adventurous maleness makes them impatient with the limitations domesticity imposes on them. Marriage is thus understood by the women to be a social arrangement that primarily meets feminine needs: for economic support, for recognized social adulthood, for domestic stability, and, most importantly, for children.

Marriage is considered such an essential part of the normal female life cycle that voluntary spinsterhood is nearly unimaginable by the women as a permanent condition. Even those who look back fondly on their single life as being *libre y alegre* (free and joyous) reject spinsterhood as an unsuitable state of being in adulthood. In the view of these informants, however, it is not the absence of a husband that accounts for the lack of fulfillment that the single woman may expect from life, but the suffering she will encounter because she has no children.

For these reasons, the women in both cities see marriage as fundamentally an economic exchange and evaluate a husband's worth primarily in terms of his ability and willingness to meet the material needs of his family. Typical of their replies to the question, "What do you like best about your husband?" were "He brings his paycheck right home," and "He gives me what I need to live on." Affection, sexual satisfaction, and emotional companionship were mentioned by a minority of the women. Marriage allows Latin American women to meet their own material needs while bearing and raising the children they wish for. They are therefore willing to submit to mistreatment by men because of important secondary gains. As one Cali informant said, "It's the rare husband who doesn't beat his wife, who

doesn't have mistresses, who is loving." However, the most common response to the question, "If he's so bad, why do you stay with him?" was, "For the sake of the children."³

The two groups of women are therefore pragmatic when they articulate their expectations regarding marriage. Caleñas are particularly emphatic about the importance of maintaining a stable conjugal union, as the following interview reveals. Libertad had been married for 19 years when she left her husband. The separation lasted a year.

Interviewer: Why did you return to your husband?

Libertad: For the simple reason that we had already established a basis together and it's better to be with someone you know, at least you know how you're going to suffer, than to be with someone you don't know and you don't know what it will be like.

Interviewer: Why is it important that you be with someone?

Libertad: Well, in the first place, there's the respect that the children get coming from a family in which the parents are married. And besides, it was uncomfortable to go out and ask some man in the street to lend me ten or fifteen pesos. Because the man who loans you money is going to want something for that money, maybe from me, maybe from my daughters. Say I left my husband for another. I could end up with someone who didn't want to support my children. They wouldn't be his children you know. My husband is very poor, but he's more or less responsible toward the children.

Libertad gives a very clear analysis of the role and function of a husband. She believes she has to be with some man; the possibility of managing alone is not realistic to her. Nevertheless, she feels that any conjugal relationship will be unsatisfying and fraught with problems. She sees men as the source of the money she and her family vitally need, and sexual favors as the mode of exchange. Women like Libertad find it both more secure and more respectable to take money from one man rather than from several. Since they believe men will more willingly support their own children, rather than those of another man, women judge monogamy to be the more secure source of income. Religious and popular standards of proper female behavior support the view that marriage is the preferable social arrangement for adult women. "Certainly it's good to live with a husband," said Margarita. "Not only are the children more respected, but you are more respected in the barrio besides. You can hold your head up and not feel ashamed of your life."

While in both cities the women see their conjugal relationships primarily in instrumental terms, their relationships to their children are more likely to combine the instrumental with the expressive dimensions expected to characterize nuclear family relationships in the contemporary world (Parsons and Bales 1955). This is particularly true in San Francisco where Latinas expect their children to provide companionship and diversion while they are young, and to serve as dependable sources of loyalty and emotional and financial support as they grow older. For example, Consuelo explained that marriage itself is not rewarding and that conjugal love is *una ilusión, nada mas* (only an illusion). She said, however, that it is really essential to have at least one child because that child may become a stable source of support in old age. The perfect arrangement, in her view, is to have one child out of wedlock and thus achieve the real goal while avoiding the complications of marriage. Every woman, she said, needs a child to love her. She agreed with Soledad who rejected remarriage for widows and divorcees who have children on the grounds that there is nothing to gain from marrying if a woman already has all the children she wants.

It may be said that Latinas get married in order to have children and that in the long run being a mother is more important than being or having been someone's wife. Having a child soon after marriage simultaneously achieves several goals. In the short run, women consider children to be a primary means toward solidifying a new marriage since they feel a man will be more committed to a woman raising his child. But in the event that the union should fail, being mothers can also enable Latinas to qualify for public assistance. More importantly, however, Latinas' maternal strategies are motivated by longer-range goals, since they are designed to insure that children will provide for their aging mothers, although

women recognize this to be a goal they may not in reality achieve. Latinas' emphasis on filial loyalty may therefore be seen as partially motivated by their recognition of the benefits they themselves may derive through their children's success.

For these reasons, Latinas feel their most weighty domestic responsibilities are focused on their children. *Cuidar a los niños* (to care for the children) is the most common description they give of their role. To sacrifice oneself (*sacrificarse*) is a constantly repeated theme in informants' testimony about motherhood: a mother must resign herself to the necessity of making sacrifices for her children, and she must put her own desires after what she judges to be their best interests. Not only is the "good mother" expected to derive adequate personal gratification from sacrificing for her children, but mothers believe that altruism and dedication to one's children will insure their ongoing loyalty and support. For example, in relating her child-rearing style, Dolores could hardly keep from smiling when she reported that she had not engaged in any pleasurable activities whatsoever while her two children were growing up. In the view of this Latina, sacrificing everything for one's children and keeping them physically very close insures their future love. Guilt plays no small part in the establishment of this kind of intense loyalty. She reported, "If your children know what you've given up on their account, they are bound to do what you want them to for the rest of their lives."

Caleñas, like Latinas, see children as essential to a complete social existence. However, Caleñas view the mother-child relationship less instrumentally than do the San Francisco women. Amparo, for example, having raised five children to adulthood, often laments that the house is too quiet now that the children are grown. She wishes she could have another baby of her own, despite her disappointment with the lack of material help she receives from her now adult children.

Both groups of women share the view that children should help care for their parents. Unlike Latinas, however, Caleñas do not expect that their children will actually comply. It is not uncommon in Cali for young children to seek their own sources of cash, either by working in the service sector of the economy, begging, or as petty thieves (Gutierrez 1977). However, the income from these activities is so minor that mothers cannot compel their children to turn over their "earnings," and often children will not voluntarily do so. Nor can aged mothers necessarily depend on their grown children for assistance. While visiting is frequent among relatives, it is usually purely social in character. Although borrowing, helping with housework, and babysitting are exchanged on an emergency basis, for the majority of Caleñas this type of assistance is not routine.

San Francisco Latinas are more likely than Caleñas to believe their children will make a long-term commitment to their mother's economic welfare because they feel that opportunities will be open to their children later in life. Several of the San Francisco Latinas, in fact, reported they had immigrated primarily to provide their children the chance for advancement through education; the women saw their own Marian self-sacrificial stance as facilitating this sought-after goal. In San Francisco, then, Latinas' domestic strategies are a means for women to invoke filial responsibility, and mothers plant seeds of emotional dependency in their children at an early age. The dream of upward mobility gives mothers the hope that a stable source of financial support will grow directly from these emotional bonds.

Latinas' and Caleñas' domestic strategies

Variations in the domestic strategies of the two groups of women may be seen to derive from differences in the types of economic and social resources found in the two cultural settings. In this section, we describe the content of the domestic strategies seen in Cali and

the San Francisco Mission and show how these strategies are used in the everyday lives of the two groups of women to achieve commonly shared goals. We show emphasis on motherhood to be particularly important in San Francisco, while conditions in Cali favor fuller elaboration of the role of wife. It should be understood, however, that we are describing ideal strategic types and that, in daily routine, behavioral differences are more a matter of degree than of kind. In Cali, for instance, we find "maternal" behavior in very "conjugal" oriented women, as well as *Caleñas* who rely exclusively on the strategy of motherhood. Nevertheless, we attempt to show that clear differences in the overall domestic strategies in San Francisco and Cali women can be identified.

Among Latinas, the centrality of relationships with children is repeatedly played out in interactions between mothers and their offspring. The emotional and physical intensity that characterizes maternal behavior, and the constant efforts mothers direct toward reinforcing ties with their children, exist parallel to, but apparently separate from, relations with husbands. This primacy of the mother-child alliance does not necessarily reflect the marginality of husbands, for it is as characteristic of families where the husband is relatively involved and present as in those where he is absent or neglectful. The difference in emphasis Latinas place on relations with husbands and children is instead most understandable if viewed in terms of women's long- and short-term goals. While relations with spouses may be satisfying in the short run, ties to children are believed to be more permanent, and their utility later in life is expected to be related directly to the kind of foundation the mother has built in her children's early years. For some women like María Carmen, this strategy of motherhood is pursued relatively unselfconsciously. Despite her close and obviously affectionate relationship with Manuel, her husband of seven years, she says she doubts the marriage will last. In other conversations, she reports her belief that Manuel, an unemployed laundry worker, will be as unsuccessful in the future as he is in the present at meeting her family's material needs. In marked contrast to her cynicism about her husband's dependability, she speaks glowingly of her expectations for ongoing ties with all her children, but especially with her oldest daughter Carmela. She says she would have been better off had she never married, and although the illegitimate births of Carmela and her son Raul were tragic events when they occurred, she now views them positively since she fully expects that they will provide her with support when they are adults. Her socialization of Carmela for adulthood relies heavily on including her in every kind of domestic interaction, allowing her to enter the world of women and to identify with their concerns long before her chronological age requires it. Maternal altruism is notably central to this socialization: Carmela absorbs a steady diet of tales of her own mother's sacrifices for her children, those made by other women they know, and those of previous generations of good mothers.

Latinas, in fact, generally portray motherhood in sacred or mystical terms, and many stories are told of the almost supernatural sensitivity mothers have to their children's needs and of the special spiritual affinities that exist between mothers and children. Stories of mothers' deaths aptly illustrate this, as they usually focus on the lifelong suffering of the mother, the martyrdom of her last days, and the never-ending admiration such behavior gained for her in the eyes of those who knew her. More often than not, the source of her suffering—poverty—is compounded by the infidelity or irresponsibility of her husband. Her life is portrayed as an ongoing quest to overcome obstacles as she cares for her children's needs.

In San Francisco, the importance of the child's role as a focal point for affiliation is intensified by the isolation many women experience, or expect to experience, as newcomers to this country. While in some cases it is possible for Latinas to reconstruct kinship-based networks in San Francisco, these groups have uncertain futures. Upward mobility sends some family members to the suburbs, or at least out of the Mission, and undercuts their sense of

obligation to their poorer relations. Unemployment forces some people to leave the city. Immigration laws further threaten the ability of many persons to maintain continuous residence here, and some regularly move back and forth between Latin America and San Francisco. Married women have less control over these conditions than men since they are expected to move according to their husbands' requirements. Not only, then, do women fear rejection and abandonment by their husbands, but they must anticipate the possible dissolution of their important friendships with women. Given the difficulties involved in establishing permanent affiliative ties with both men and women, children appear to be a secure source of continuous emotional gratification, and most importantly, one over which women may exercise control.

Mission Latinas therefore rely on the establishment, maintenance, and reinforcement of ties of intense loyalty with children. Both explicitly and implicitly, such ties are expected to give rise to the kind of support that women believe they cannot hope to receive from men and that they must have to survive. The anxiety women experience in contemplating the impermanence of their own conjugal unions is revealed in the kind of statements made, without elicitation, by nearly all Latina informants. These statements vary in content but they adhere to a single basic form. "Some women don't mind if their husbands do X [drink excessively, sleep with other women, stay out all night, hit them, or other offenses to domestic stability], but if my husband ever did X, I would take my children and leave him for good."⁴ Latinas know they lack direct means to control their husbands' actions since their material dependency is intensified by the norm that Latinos not make strong emotional commitments to their wives. But by threatening to take extreme action in response to what in reality is common male marital behavior, women maintain the ultimate power to limit its effect. Ties with children are of a different order since women have the ability to control their offspring, at least while they are young, through their physical and emotional dependency. Latinas' "maternal" strategy is based on their intent to draw upon this emotional dependency later in life.

Intimacy and guilt, promoted through emphasis on the mother's altruism, are the principal means of effecting the desired control. The Latinas' wish to control the physical activities of their children provides a concrete expression of mothers' preoccupation with these bonds. Time that children spend away from home, an unavoidable consequence of attempts to achieve upward mobility, often represents a challenge to the mother's ability to exercise moral control over their development. Away from home, children confront seemingly limitless opportunities to make potentially harmful friendships, to learn new (American) ideas that might undermine respect for one's parents, and in general to escape maternal influence. This view of the extradomestic world as a potential source of moral hazards mandates a high degree of physical control over the child's daily routine. If children are to be protected, they must be under nearly constant observation. Since the mother's other duties tie her to the house for most of her work day, this need for control means, in effect, that children must stay at home, under the mother's watchful eye, for most of the time not legitimately claimed by another activity, such as school. One mother said, for example, that she didn't like the idea of her children spending time in other children's homes. "They might pick up all kinds of strange ideas," she said, and she feared that problems would develop because "American families aren't as strict as Latin families." Another informant explained her motivation for attempting to maintain nearly constant physical control over her children: "You never know what might happen in the street." She backed up her conclusions with a repertoire of awesome tales about children who were led to use drugs because of "bad influences," or whose freedom led to some other kind of un-filial behavior.

These fears of losing a child's loyalty often translate into a preoccupation with accident

or injury; whenever such an incident is known to have occurred, mothers dwell on it as a justification for the precautions they normally exercise. Mothers' containment of their children's movements, then, is undertaken with the explicit goal of reducing their exposure to mishap. Implicitly, this amounts to a bid for emotional as well as physical control, and it fosters the development of mutual dependence between mother and child. It also severely restricts the conditions under which mothers can seek and maintain outside employment and thus reinforces their need to center their strategies on the maternal role.

Time at home with children is often characterized by nearly continuous physical contact, as when women join their children at the television set to watch cartoons, either embracing or hitting them, but in either case maintaining nearly constant tactile contact during this time. Women's explanations for this practice vary, although concern over possible accidents that might befall the child are especially prominent. Thus, the caution that mothers exercise in attempting to control their children's activities indicates that competing pressures are seen as potential threats to maternal influence.

However, in light of the circumstances Latinas face as immigrants, strategies based on ties with children are unavoidably fraught with uncertainty. Mission District Latinas are aware that if their children are to achieve the material success that very likely motivated the family's immigration, they must learn English, get a good education, and become assimilated enough to deal effectively with the American occupational system. Nevertheless, as just indicated, assimilation to American culture may mean that children will not maintain the desired level of loyalty to the mother. Paradoxically, then, even while they base their strategies on enhancing relations with children, San Francisco Latinas are "aware" that these strategies, in the end, may not work and that they may yet face isolation and destitution if their children fail to meet the expectations that are at the heart of their efforts.

In the context of larger, lifetime strategies, then, Latinas' maternal behavior, in its altruistic, self-sacrificial aspect, may be seen to be motivated by more than Marian selflessness. Rather, it is an adaptive mechanism, part of a strategy for dealing with the mediated, indirect quality of women's relationships to essential resources. Lacking a means to command material wealth, women instead seek to engender loyalty through interpersonal means. The characteristic behaviors associated with motherhood among Mission District Latinas may be understood as a way of solidifying such interpersonal ties.

Unlike Latinas, *Caleñas* find little justification for focusing their energies on solidifying ties with children, which they view as fundamentally uncertain despite the emotional rewards that motherhood brings. Few women expect that their children will be able or willing to contribute to their support later in life, in contrast to Latinas who operate with the expectation, or dream, of their children's upward mobility. Remarkably the *Caleña* Amparo with reference to her three adult sons:

I still hope that Mauricio will get a better job so that I can stop working. He's good about helping out with household expenses, but his job pays so little he hardly has any left over for me. Charles is a good, hard worker, only he spends all his money on drink and women. His wife is always unhappy about that; and she's so selfish besides. . . . I know I can't count on Roberto either. He's off earning good money now in Venezuela working in a factory, but he spends it all every weekend drinking and gambling with his friends. Once he sent some back to me with a neighbor but the neighbor says he was robbed on his way to Cali and that was the last any of us heard of that money. . . .

Amparo is in fact very close to her children. Her married son, Charles, visits once a week; she sits up long into the night with her unmarried son, Mauricio, and her teen-age daughters talking about the day's events. But although she would like to count on her children, in reality she knows she cannot rely on any of them for ongoing assistance.

As previously mentioned, Latinas can work toward a long-term subsistence strategy

based on their children because public assistance and other available social supports free them from the uncertainty associated with meeting short-term needs through men. *Caleñas* function in a different world, for instead of bringing them access to sources of subsistence, motherhood undermines *Caleñas'* ability to compete in the economic marketplace. Emphasis on strengthening ties with men, however, nearly inevitably brings children, so most *Caleñas* must eventually try to make their way with dependent offspring. Obtaining male support, however, is at best uncertain in cities like Cali. The demographic structure of the city resembles that of many rapidly growing Latin American cities where there are more women than men. Young women are attracted to the city both because of the apparent job opportunities as servants and because many parents encourage their daughters to leave the progressively worsening rural economic situations. In addition, many young women move to the city seeking freedom from strict parental control. Nevertheless, young female migrants are soon likely to become mothers, and once this occurs their options decrease markedly since they cannot simultaneously work and care for their children.

Without the possibility of public assistance, *Caleñas* find themselves in competition with one another for economic support from men, a competition encouraged by the machismo ideology that rewards male inconstancy with increased prestige within both the male and female communities. In Cali, there are few cultural supports to encourage a man to act responsibly toward his children and faithfully toward his wife. Rather, men gain status among their peers for sexual conquests and tangible demonstrations of virility. In addition, many single women say they prefer older men who have already fathered children as their social and sexual partners since these men are believed to have more worldly experience as well as greater financial resources. This means that a man who has abandoned one family will be readily able to establish another liaison.

This situation contrasts sharply with that of San Francisco. While the same ideology of machismo encourages men to seek personal and sexual gratification even at the expense of their family's needs, and while women in San Francisco agree that men are not to be trusted, the existence of public assistance and some limited public supports for single mothers permit Latinas to rely less exclusively on men as a source of subsistence. Mission District mothers expect their children to be able to support them eventually, and they thus devote themselves to encouraging the level of commitment in the children that will ensure their future loyalty. *Caleñas* rarely have these options. They have no reason to believe that their children will provide for them, and while they maintain close affective ties with their offspring, there is no need to elaborate the Marian image the way Latinas do. *Caleñas*, instead, work with the known unreliability of men in seeking to establish some basis for surviving, since they must in the short run meet their material needs.

The *Caleñas'* assumption that men cannot be trusted, however, promotes competition among women, most dramatically revealed in patterns of possessiveness and jealousy. These patterns mirror the jealousy that is characteristic of Latinas' relationships with their children. Just as Latinas fear they will forfeit their children's loyalty if they let them stray from home, *Caleñas* expect to lose their hold on their men if they let them out of their sight. Male and female *Caleñas* agree that women are more jealous than men, and they cite jealousy as the most common and most serious of conjugal problems. Witchcraft beliefs are strong, particularly in the lower classes, and an unexplained persistent illness, such as a rash in an unusual configuration or a sore that will not heal, is apt to be attributed to the machinations of a jilted lover or wife. Physical fights between women are not uncommon on barrio streets and outside cantinas. Women who feel they have been wrongfully abandoned may go to the places their ex-partners frequent and verbally or physically attack them or their (inevitable) female companions. The resolution of these conflicts sometimes

takes a truly violent turn and “murders of passion” occur in the area at the rate of one or two per week. Two of the seven reported in the Cali papers during the month of February 1976 were committed by women, although the image of the Virgin Mary would lead us to expect that women would instead passively accept their ill fortune. In one case, a Caleña shot a woman friend when she saw her with a former lover. In the other, a woman and a male accomplice fatally stabbed her ex-husband as he was on his way to work. *El no será ni para la una ni para la otra* (“He’s not going to be anyone’s anymore”) were reported as her words as she left him to die.

The image of female altruism and selflessness simply does not describe Caleñas who actively seek out men as part of their survival strategy. An examination of dress, makeup, and personal style, particularly revealed in the “beauty queen” image of Colombian women, amply illustrates this. Harkness and Flora (1974) see the beauty queen as one of the few roles the media promotes as available to women, and only one of two (the other is the “saintly mother”) potentially open to women of all social classes. Of the beauty queen they write:

The role itself is not unique to Colombia, but its frequency, publicity, and pageantry in Colombia are unusual. . . . Competitions are associated with the administrative units and/or events (Independence, holidays like Carnival . . .), products (sugar, cotton), or organizations (social clubs). Each of these many competitions is given much play, particularly in local newspapers (1974:222).

The dimensions of the beauty queen role, like those of the saintly mother, are derived from intrinsic female attributes. However, the Colombian beauty queen image is distinct in its emphasis on expressions of sexuality: skin-tight slacks, brief and revealing blouses, spike-heeled shoes, exaggerated makeup. This is no Miss America pageant where wholesome good looks must be enhanced by talent and a “pleasing” personality. Physical appearance is the sole criterion for success in this role, both in pageants and in the society at large.

Further illustration of the way the vamp-beauty queen role is actively pursued is seen nightly on streetcorners of working-class barrios where some unmarried girls from respectable families whistle to, wink at, and ogle passing men. Others stroll the barrio streets in groups of two or more, crossing over to pass close by a knot of men, sometimes inviting those they are acquainted with to take them to a movie or a dance. Upon marriage, some women shift to the more traditional version of the female role, concentrating their energies on their children, and seldom leaving their homes.

Nevertheless, marriage and motherhood seldom give Caleñas a feeling of permanent economic security, for men are seen as intrinsically fickle. Women therefore strive to keep their options open. Mothers, like single women, try to remain beautiful and sexually provocative since they cannot know when they will again be thrown into competition for a man. They differ in this regard from Latinas, who steadfastly insist that sexual relations with men are of no further interest to them once they have all the children they want. Interestingly, despite these contrasting emphases, sexuality for both groups of women is, in part, explicitly tied to their adaptive strategies. Caleñas work to remain sexually desirable and to enhance their seductiveness; Latinas manipulate abstinence, calling forth images of self-sacrifice and altruism.

Although the Marian image of the saintly mother remains an option for the Caleña, it is a progressively less secure role in contemporary Colombian life and is seen to be a less advantageous choice. Many women instead see the importance of developing active strategies that allow them to more effectively pursue their own ends. Flora (1973:78) writes that Colombian women use the role of Eve, the temptress, to seduce men into a commitment. We go further and suggest that for Caleñas, the role of Eve is part of an ongoing strategy that they use to exploit an increasingly marginal economic situation. While San

Francisco Latinas rely on the fragile security afforded by intense filial loyalty, Caleñas seek to increase control over resources through an ultimately uncertain conjugal tie. Like their Mission District counterparts, the inherent contradictions embodied in these efforts do not escape their attention, and their jealousy and anxiety over relations with men attest to the precariousness of their position.

conclusions

The two strategies we have described are not mutually exclusive but instead constitute related variations on a basic theme. Both groups of women, while living in cash economies, face restricted access to basic resources. The strategies they employ in response to this resultant dependency are rooted in elaborations of the traditional female role, although the particular conditions that prevail in each setting lead to emphasis on either its conjugal or maternal aspect. In this sense, women's role behavior emerges as instrumental as well as expressive, as an adaptive response rather than merely the given state of affairs to which a response must be made.

While the strategies of the two groups of women are simultaneously short- and long-term in their intent, in practice these strategies are not equally effective at meeting both types of goals. Caleñas' emphasis on the conjugal aspect of the women's role leads to diffuse ties with children, who are then less likely to support their mothers later in life. Yet Caleñas also become more economically insecure as they grow older, due to the instability of conjugal bonds in that city. Greater congruence is seen in the short- and long-term "maternal" strategies of San Francisco Latinas. In the short run, having children entitles a woman to a husband's support or to public assistance in his absence. In the long run, children who are successful at gaining a place in the economic structure of the society are more likely to provide their mothers with a steady source of old-age assistance. However, in both settings, while children are central to the acquisition of valued social, economic, and moral rewards, their existence ultimately impedes women's access to the public domain (Rosaldo 1974) and deepens their dependency.

Throughout this paper, we have characterized women's maternal and conjugal behaviors as strategies, despite the apparent limitations on their efficacy, because they represent a means by which women seek to accomplish ends, even though the full range of factors that impinge upon their actions may be beyond their own control. Cali and San Francisco women select from extremely limited options, most of which offer more opportunities for failure than for success. While motherhood and child-care responsibilities define the basic parameters of the women's predicament in both settings, and while the women share a common cultural framework, only the San Francisco situation promotes the elaboration of the Marian complex with its emphasis on maternal martyrdom. Caleñas instead use physical characteristics to attract and hold the attentions of men. Nevertheless, the two approaches seek to accomplish the same goal. Both the beauty queen and the self-sacrificing martyr can appropriately be viewed as strategic actors, as "economic women" actively manipulating resources.

notes

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¹ The data on San Francisco Mission District Latinas were gathered in the course of an ethnographic study of the economics of motherhood among Latin American immigrant women (Lewin 1974). The researcher relied on a combination of participant observation and lengthy informal interviews with 11 principal informants and some 30 other residents of the district over an 18-month period. Seven key informants were presently married and 4 were formerly married mothers; all were resident in the United States for no longer than 10 years. Informants included natives of Mexico, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, all of whom spoke little or no English and who ranged in age from 23 to 39. While the numbers of coresident dependent children varied from none (in the case of an informant whose children remained behind when she immigrated) to five, 8 of the women in the San Francisco study group had three or more children.

The data presented on Caleñas were collected during a larger study of the sociological concomitants of unwanted pregnancy and the decision to have an illegal abortion. One hundred eight interviews were conducted and supplementary material was obtained through participant observation (Browner 1976). All but 8 of the Caleñas were mothers at the time they were interviewed. The Cali study population of 108 did not differ significantly with regard to such basic sociodemographic indicators as marital status, number of living children, or number of abortions, from a random sample of women who visited a government health center for routine gynecological care between January 1973 and August 1975 (Browner 1979). Further, in-depth interviews revealed no systematic differences in views of motherhood between women in the study group who sought and did not seek abortions. The Caleñas who were interviewed were, on the average, between 25 and 35 years old and had only a few years of formal education. Their numbers of living children ranged from 0 to 14, with most of the women having 3 or 4 children. Nearly two-thirds of the women had been born in Cali or had accompanied their parents' migration while young.

² Pseudonyms have been used in all ethnographic examples.

³ One woman with a somewhat jaded eye remarked: "Everyone always says, 'for the children, for the children.' But you know what you end up with when you stay for the children? More children!"

⁴ In Spanish this went more or less as follows: "Hay mujeres que no se preocupan cuando los hombres se emborrachan, pasan tiempo con otras mujeres, salen y no vuelven a la casa hasta la madrugada, las dan golpes, pero, si mi marido una vez sola hiciera una cosa así, yo me iría con los niños para siempre."

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