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THE U.S. MEXICAN IMMIGRANT FAMILY IN A CHANGING SOCIETY: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Abstract. This article charts literature debates about the structural changes of the Mexican immigrant family in the United States. It presents, first, a critical overview of the conventional literature on the Mexican immigrant family, typically framed around *assimilation* models, their major themes, and shortcomings. Then, shifting frameworks, this paper shows how structural inequality and feminist models, as critical approaches to emerging immigrant family forms, help us to understand the transformational parallels between U.S. society and the Mexican immigrant family structure. It is argued in this article that the Mexican family is structurally diverse. In doing so, the discussion is placed in the larger context of the U.S., explaining how historical and present social forces associated with unequal access to economic, labor, and educational opportunities have perpetuated the marginality of the Mexican immigrant family vis-à-vis the mainstream family. The paper also outlines and discusses the ways feminist, intersectional, and postmodernism frameworks shape the current literature debates on immigrant families. Lastly, it discusses how diversity in terms of family structure and family life contributes to the general field of family study in the U.S. and globally.

Keywords: immigrant families, Mexican families, U.S. families.

1. Introduction

This review charts the scholarship of the Mexican immigrant family in the United States. First, it provides a critical overview of conventional sociological research on the immigrant family, its major themes, and its shortcomings. The conventional sociological scholarship views the lack of assimilation and retention of culture in the immigrant family as the roots of social problems in society. Second, it outlines, describes, and discusses the relevant body of work on

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Mexican immigrant families and why this literature is vastly different from much of the work conducted in the past. These perspectives about the immigrant family offer new insights on assimilation (Valdez 2006) and challenge conventional assumptions about traditional views of the Mexican family (Ybarra 1999). Moreover, it provides a more diverse set of family frameworks to analyze Mexican immigrant family life. These discussions are placed in the larger context of the U.S., explaining how theoretical frameworks like structural inequality, feminism, intersectionality, and postmodernism shape the social positionality of immigrant families. Third, it discusses how diversity in terms of family structure and family life contributes to the general field of family study in the U.S. and globally.

2. A critical overview of the conventional research on immigrant families: a point of departure

an approach that has been pervasive and historically significant in the conventional literature on the immigrant family up to the 1970s is the confluence of assimilation with cultural deficiency frameworks (Pyke 2004: 255).

Previously, a vast amount of literature based on the European immigrant experience centered on assimilation (Park 2005; Warner, Srole 2005), and thus, assimilation drove immigrant family scholarship in the early 20th century. In general terms, assimilation, according to Park, is defined as the experience in which societal institutions expect "the immigrant [to] readily take over the language, manners, the social ritual, and outward forms of his adopted country" (Park 2005: 34). The purpose of assimilation, according to Park, is to incorporate immigrants into primary groups so that they can experience upward social mobility and be immersed into a homogenous identity (Park 2005: 35).

Similarly, Warner and Srole demonstrate that assimilation as a social force centers its attention on European immigrants, emphasizing immigrants who are White, English-speaking, and Protestant. In contrast, immigrants who do not resemble this image – darker, non-English-speaking, non-Protestant – are considered biologically deficient and hardly capable of being assimilated (Warner, Srole 2005: 57). In this way, assimilation serves as a path to upward mobility for a limited portion of the immigrant population: White, English-speaking, Protestant European immigrants. Their proximity in terms of phenotype, language, and religion to the general population allows them to facilitate their incorporation into mainstream society. Park suggests that even when people of color are capable of being assimilated, prejudice based on their physical traits presents a major obstacle (Park 2005: 36).

In the 1970s, the assimilation model gradually shifts. Because assimilation implies success, immigrant families are expected to assimilate into the American mainstream regardless of racial membership (Pyke 2004: 257). Immigrant

families that do not assimilate are viewed as sources of social problems and as *culturally deficient* entities (as critiqued by Lamanna, Riedmann 2003: 76). Much of the research of the time suggests that cultural frameworks prevailed to contextualize and justify the social position of the unassimilated immigrant family (Lewis 1966; Rubel 1970).

Because normative research framed the immigrant family life as culturally deficient, a pervasive image of a culturally bonded immigrant family based on disorganization and poverty permeated. *Themes* that emerge in the culture-as-deficient discourse on immigrant family life are, first, a pattern of familism and unitary close-knit structures (Rubel 1970: 216) as cultural anomalies that preclude integration into mainstream society. Second, the pervasive image of a monolithic immigrant family characterized by multigenerational bonds and a close-knit structure (Fitzpatrick 1971: 83–84). Lastly, a family structure modeled on *patriarchal authority* (machismo) that diminishes family life (Díaz-Guerrero 1975).

In this way, a clear example of familism as a cultural anomaly, as Vega points out, feeds the image of a universal type of the Mexican immigrant family characterized by close bonds and family ties that preclude social mobility and integration (Vega 1995: 7). Rubel's ethnographic work depicts how the Mexican and Mexican American family life in the *Mexiquito* enclave reflects this *familistic* image. In this relatively small space, extended family systems "[…] comprise a number of bilaterally-oriented small families, to which individuals acknowledge their only binding allegiance" (Rubel 1970: 211). Culture, loyalty, and attachment to the nuclear and extended family, as Rubel asserts, keep members bonded within their limited space of social interaction.

Similarly, several studies of the 1970s suggest that patriarchal authority, as a *premigration* of cultural belief, permeates immigrant family life. For example, Díaz-Guerrero (1975) suggests that men, as heads of households, expect women's absolute submission. Rubel argues that because Mexican girls have to follow the moral and social norms of courtship and marriage, they are confined in the home until they are married, just as it would be back in Mexico; otherwise they could be punished (Rubel 1970: 215).

While conventional research provides important elements of analysis, it also has flaws. In describing the immigrant family as a culturally deficient entity, conventional research devalues immigrant families' adaptation processes to different social environments. For example, in viewing the immigrant family as a monolithic entity, normative research fails to recognize how families adapt their structures to different social conditions emerging in different forms. Unlike U.S. families in the mainstream who stress individualism over familism, Mexican immigrants use familism to cope with institutional, social and economic exclusion (Baca Zinn, Pok 2002: 93). These cultural attributes facilitate immigrant families' the ability to overcome deprived social and economic conditions rather than to perpetuate inequality.

Furthermore, in relegating women and gender roles to a subordinated position, conventional research fails to recognize that the immigrant family is not a fixed and unitary entity based on power and authority. Instead, as a growing body of scholarship suggests, egalitarian gender-role rearrangements evolve from internal power dynamics and from external social and economic forces tied to the present U.S. postindustrial conditions (Pesquera 1993; Pyke 2004).

3. Relevant body of work on the Mexican immigrant family

as noted above, much conventional research views the Mexican immigrant family as a culturally deficient entity. Models that emphasize the lack of assimilation and cultural deficiencies prevail in this normative work. Immigrants who do not embrace the values of the dominant group are portrayed as prone to "idleness, promiscuity, failure to assimilate, criminal mindedness, and lack of intelligence" (see Bender 2003: 114 for a detailed critique on this culture model). A revisionist body of the literature provides valuable insights and looks very different from much of the work conducted in the past. This body of work on immigrant families offers different answers to questions about assimilation and culture and challenges conventional assumptions about familism, unitary structures, and patriarchy.

As mentioned above, in the conventional literature, immigrants who follow an assimilationist path are expected to achieve upward mobility and to integrate themselves into mainstream society (DeWind, Kasinitz 1997: 1097). Immigrants who do not follow this path are considered culturally deficient, unwilling, due mostly to cultural reasons to integrate themselves into mainstream life. In contrast, revisionist research centers its analysis on adaptation processes precluded by the racial, social, and economic conditions of immigration (Pyke 2004: 258). As an alternative framework, the segmented assimilation theory emerged to offer a different view about the assimilation experience (Zhou 1997).

Segmented assimilation as an alternative explanation offers a new insight in the analysis of the immigrant family. It contributes to the new social science scholarship by discarding the notion of universal assimilation. It underscores that life opportunities are different for immigrant families of color who may assimilate into communities with limited social and economic resources (Zhou 1997: 987). Education, English proficiency, place of birth, length of residence, race/ethnicity, family socioeconomic background, and place of residence determine into what segment of the society immigrant groups assimilate into (Zhou 1997: 984). Portes and Zhou suggest that the segmented assimilation process that leads to downward mobility is even more pervasive among youths of color who embrace the attributes of economically deprived communities (Portes, Zhou 2005: 225).

As a case in point, Smith describes "[…] how gang activity has resulted from changes in the migration process itself, including the migration of male

teenagers and their assimilation in New York" (Smith 2005: 207). According to Smith these teens are channeled into disadvantaged segments of integration (e.g. gang membership) because the education of the parents is limited and the long hours of work are exhausting (Smith 2005: 214). Other factors that affect the social integration of immigrants, Rodriguez suggests, arise from the postindustrial conditions of the U.S. economy. In urban city environments, it is argued, these conditions offer limited work opportunities to Mexican immigrants; thus, immigrants find jobs mostly in the low-wage, service-oriented labor market. Lack of English proficiency and education, Rodriguez argues, creates a social environment of isolation, limiting opportunities in mainstream society (Rodriguez 1993: 125).

Unlike assimilation cultural frameworks, the revisionist literature about the Mexican immigrant family demonstrates three significant points. (1) Familism works as a way to respond to the institutional discrimination immigrant families undergo (Bustamante 2013; Thornton Dill 1999). (2) No monolithic immigrant family prevails; instead, new forms of the immigrant family emerge out of the social and economic constraints imposed by U.S. society, producing quite diverse and complex organizational structures (Bustamante, Alemán 2007; Chavez 1992). (3) "Gender-role expectations are fluid [and] responsive to changing family structure and economic demands" (Vega 1995: 10). Diverging from previous research that positioned decision-making as one of the main components that characterized patriarchal families, this scholarship suggests that while gendered negotiations occur in the immigrant family milieu, passive roles dilute slowly into more fluid and dynamic positions of power (Bustamante 2013; Pesquera 1993; Ybarra 1999).

Reflective of the new literature on familism, Bustamante (2013) posits that Mexican familism, as an alternative model, aids in the reproduction and maintenance of immigrant families. This framework, for example, can refer to the support that families give to other family members, nuclear and extended alike, which takes different forms and serves several purposes. Moreover, as Thornton Dill suggests, fictive kin networks constitute a critical component of familism in which *compadrazgo* (co-parenting) symbolically ties Mexican families through *godparenthood* (*ahijados*). This form of extended family, based on religious customs and socioeconomic components, creates a moral and economic obligation to the godchildren, extending family networks beyond bloodlines (Thornton Dill 1999: 163). Many studies demonstrate (Hurtado 2003; Vega 1995) that Mexican immigrant families benefit from extended familial networks, in contrast to mainstream families that move away from family ties.

In spite of the traditional notion of the immigrant family – monolithic, multigenerational, and close-knit, a recent number of studies related to the subject approach the study of immigrant families from diverse perspectives. As Pyke cogently states:

immigrant families constitute a wide range of dynamic family types: the extended, nuclear, transnational, reunited, and female-headed household, and those forms, such as co-residence groups, that are newly constructed out of the conditions of immigration (Pyke 2004: 257).

For example, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila describe how Mexican transnational families, a form of an immigrant family in which one partner works abroad while the other stays in the country of origin, sustain their family dynamics by rearranging their transnational motherhood responsibilities. The use of phone calls, letters, and photos becomes central in the reduction of the effects of physical separation, especially the emotional (Hondagneu-Sotelo, Avila 2000: 288). Another example of the diverse forms that make up immigrant families is the *binational family*. The binational family, a term coined by Chavez, is composed of a mix of immigration-legal status members. Here, one partner may hold an undocumented immigrant status while the other may be a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident. Other cases may involve children who are born in the U.S. to undocumented immigrant parents. A mix of two or more nationalities/citizenships characterizes these types of families (Chavez 1992: 129).

In examining patriarchy and gender dynamics in the Mexican immigrant family, the new literature, influenced by feminist scholars (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000), tells us that gender negotiations do take place in the immigrant family setting. Unlike previous research that assumed premigrant patriarchal cultural beliefs prevailed in the immigrant family setting, the current research centers its attention on how the entrance of women into wage labor impacts gender dynamics in the immigrant family (Pyke 2004: 260). As Hirsch notes in her case study of Mexican women in Atlanta, access to employment gives Mexican women social and economic independence from men (Hirsch 1999: 1343). Immigration and opportunities to work, Hirsch argues, provide an opening for economic independence from men. Because of the attention feminist scholars give to the immigrant family, gender dynamics and wage labor have gained visibility and contribute to improve the social positions of women. Yet further attention is still needed to the issues of decision-making processes and division of household labor.

Much of the literature on Mexican egalitarian decision-making processes suggests that the transformation of the Mexican family evolves from migration experiences in which "spousal negotiation replace[s] the patriarchal exertions of authority" (Hondagneu-Sotelo, Messner 1999: 351). Particularly, where women's employment gives "[…] resources and contributions to the family economy" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992: 397), increasing their influence over shared decision-making. Unlike outdated models of patriarchy, Ybarra asserts, Mexican families prefer to share decisions in the family setting because "problems are created if decision-making isn't shared" (Ybarra 1999: 256).

Ybarra (1999: 262) also tells us how the division of household labor in the immigrant family has been transformed by the insertion of women into the labor force. In contrast to the conventional image of the immigrant family – patriarchal

and segregated household roles – Ybarra's research finds that husbands do contribute to a much fairer division of household labor reflecting an immigrant family structure more egalitarian. Both partners participated in grocery shopping, cooking, and yard work (Ybarra 1999: 258). This tendency to help with household chores increases over time when partners go into the labor force. As Ybarra's findings highlight, "[t]he great majority of wives in the present study, stated that working is what causes them to demand help in household chores and child care" (Ybarra 1999: 262). As noted above, one factor that contributes to some changes in the gender dynamics of the immigrant family milieu, at least in the decision-making process and the division of household labor, is the integration of women into wage labor (Hirsch 1999; Ybarra 1999).

Furthermore, as it is explained in what follows, other frameworks, including structural inequality, feminist, intersectional, and postmodern models, additionally expand our understanding of the ways the larger social structure shapes the Mexican immigrant family.

4. Family frameworks

Shifting away from the cultural perspectives previously discussed, a growing body of literature studies immigrant families from micro- and macro-levels of analyses. Both levels of analyses include social forces that shape immigrant family life, such as race, economic constraints, and opportunities, and class. This analysis is relevant to postindustrial conditions since much of the immigrant family reconfiguration in the U.S. stems from global and local social and economic transformations. This section reviews the work on how immigrant families are shaped by structural inequality, feminist, intersectionality, and postmodern frameworks, their themes, and insights.

4.1. Structural inequality

Wright Mills (1959) laid the groundwork for the concept of structural inequality in *The Sociological Imagination*. Wright Mills's work today remains relevant because it encourages social scientists to organize their analyses of social life on two levels: micro- and macro-level structures. Whereas the macro-level of analysis centers its attention on the social structures and institutions in which the society is organized around (e.g. economy, education, etc.), the micro-level of analysis centers its attention on the social life dynamics of individuals and individual groups (e.g. families). These two systems, according to Wright Mills, are mutually shaped and affected. For instance, as Aulette astutely describes, social life in a very competitive society, like the U.S., prods individuals to believe that they choose their own destinies. Although it is *partly* true that people do

make decisions about their lives, these decisions are constrained by larger social forces, macro-level conditions of society such as ideology, technology, and social institutions. Inversely, the same institutions that constrain individuals' and individual groups' choices can be engaged by individuals and groups to create solutions for the social inequalities they face in their daily interaction with social institutions (Aulette 2007: 5).

In examining the immigrant family through the lens of structural inequality, this body of work focuses on how macrostructural social forces shape microstructural dynamics of social life (e.g., immigrant families). Baca Zinn, Eitzen and Wells (2008) in this way confirm, from a macro-level analysis, the extent the U.S. economic transformation from industrial to postindustrial society has reconfigured society as well as families. Middle- and working-class families face new challenges in their workplaces in the face of outsourcing, new technologies, state relocation, and mega-mergers. Parallel to these societal and economic upheavals, social relations between individuals and individual groups (e.g. working-class families vis-à-vis immigrant families) experience a fierce competitive job market. In times of prosperity, the working class shares jobs with immigrants; however, in times of economic impasses, this same working class hesitates to welcome new immigrants. Low-wage jobs become scarce commodities, and limited working opportunities result in immigrant communities becoming scapegoats during economic upheavals.

Studies about the Mexican immigrant family also call into question the role of public policies on exacerbating inequality among Mexican communities. Ferreti's (2017) research, for example, shows how proposition H.B. 56 in Alabama has negatively affected Mexican immigrant families. Proposition H.B. 56, through its refusal to provide social and educational services for undocumented children and individuals, forces immigrant families to return back home – i.e. self-deportation. Even when Mexican immigrants prefer to stay in the U.S., this public policy, Ferreti argues, restricts their permanent residence, directing their biological and social reproduction to Mexico, as we have seen it during the Trump administration (*Immigration* 2020).

Whereas a postindustrial societal transformation where high skilled labor associated with educational, technological, and administrative components literally mirrors social class privilege, low income labor opportunities remain a pervasively constrained option for many Mexican immigrant families (*Wages and Working* 2016). The relevant point of this argument is that even when several U.S. localities treat this low-wage labor as their prime commodity, the harsher the anti-immigrant public policy implementation and the social inequalities Mexican families must face (Gorman, Wilson 2021).

4.2. Feminist framework

In the 19th century, the first wave feminism or the suffragist movement strove for equal voting and reproduction rights and access to higher education, property, and earnings. Eventually, this social movement, at least in the U.S., accomplished its goals to some extent. In time, feminism as a social movement experienced a second and third wave. Second wave feminism sought to answer the question of why women suffer oppression and began to implement remedies. Today, the third wave, distinct from previous waves in its diversity, confronts the gendered social order and different forms of oppression for men and women of color. It aims to end gender and race inequality as its basic premise (Lorber 2005: 1–18).

Given that feminism encompasses a variety of actors and social situations, its processes differ among groups. In fact, there is not a monolithic theory that explains the complex interplays of social inequalities. Moreover, because gender inequality transpires in different dimensions, feminism has evolved different ways to confront it. In the 1960s and 1970s, classical feminist theories – i.e. liberal, Marxist, socialist, and radical feminists – emerged from the second wave feminist movement to confront the oppression of women (Ingoldsby et al. 2004: 187). However, as Lorber (2005) argues, mostly white middle-class women's issues dominated the second wave movements, thus ignoring the gendered social order and the racial oppression men and women of color experienced. As a result, a new set of contemporary feminist perspectives emerged – e.g. multiracial feminism and feminist studies of men, among others – out of the political movements of people of color to challenge the gender and social inequalities minority individuals and individual groups face in society.

Some scholars interested in the Mexican immigrant family from a feminist perspective examine gendered patterns of subordination in the context of paid labor and family separation (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Sánchez 2017; Vasquez-Tokos 2017). In the former, ethnographic evidence provided by Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007) explores how patterns of the paid domestic labor market focus mostly on immigrant women of color. That is to say that many middle- and upper-class families rely on immigrant women to deal with housework chores and childcare needs. And, thanks to these domestic workers, these white middle-class women are able to work, leaving their household labor and childcare to lower-class immigrant women of color. Moreover, because of their immigration status, many *domesticas* live secluded in employers' houses for long periods of time, virtually invisible to society. Many of these domestic workers who immigrate to the U.S. leave families behind and face family and emotional disruptions. Every day these immigrant women have to confront emotional and physical detachment from their immediate family members. Or as a Hochschild describes, developed countries not only exploit the natural resources of less developed countries, but they also, in order to fulfill their care deficit, take away love and care providers from developing countries (Hochschild 2002: 29).

Bustamante and Alemán (2007) also found that Mexican immigrant males, as cheap labor commodities, are affected by the larger social forces of global social inequality. Here, Mexican immigrant men, in their prime and married, are in high demand to work in lower-wage, service-oriented jobs. For employers, the rationale to hire married immigrants is economically sensible. Since laborers are separated from their families and their families are not physically present, immigrants have little reason to not work longer hours. Thus, because immigrants' labor contracts renew on a yearly basis, the relative financial stability of the families left behind enables workers' a submissive attitude, assuring their rehire the following year. In this way, employment security contextualizes the marginal position immigrants must face.

The literature highlights many of the unresolved gender and social inequality issues Mexican immigrant families face as they experience incorporation into the labor market. As such, feminist work focuses on the impact of gendered labor practices on family separation and its effects. To support this argument, there is literature suggesting that *better* labor opportunities in the U.S. compel Mexican immigrant women and men to leave behind their families (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Sánchez 2017). Whereas immigrant women work for professional families as home servants, immigrant men work long hours in low-wage service labor. The important point of this argument is that both women and men work separated from their families in adverse conditions under hostile social environments to economically sustain their families. Transnational parenting in this way functions as a familial response to the disruption of motherhood and fatherhood responsibilities.

4.3. Intersections of class, race/ethnicity, and gender

Intersectionality scholars (Baca Zinn, Thornton Dill 2000; Hill Collins 2000), in the midst of the second wave feminist movement, questioned mainstream feminism. Early feminist scholars saw family as the primary source of women's oppression, mostly rooted in a patriarchal system. However, women of color claimed that their experience did not fit this mold. Although patriarchy was present, race and class overshadowed gender inequality within the family structure (Baca Zinn, Thornton Dill 2000: 23). As a result, Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill suggest that an intersectionality analysis of family should begin with race (Baca Zinn, Thornton Dill 2000: 24), not only within family relations, but also between different families.

Much research on intersectionality stems from multiple people's experiences of oppression tied to their race, class, gender, and sexuality and social location – that is, the place where individuals ascribed and achieved statuses decrease and/or increase life opportunities in society (Baca Zinn, Thornton Dill 2000: 26; Hill Collins 2000: 22). And even when resources and opportunities for individuals are

restricted in terms of gender, class, and race/ethnicity, a number of studies suggest that educational access (Carrillo 2016) and entrepreneurial prospects (Valdez 2016) may help to experience upward social mobility. Yet, because individuals and individual groups in the most privileged social location (e.g. white, male, upper-class, and heterosexual) differ in their views, life experiences, and opportunities in relation to oppressed groups or individuals (e.g. Latinx, female, lower-class, and lesbian), intersectionality scholars still very active advocating for a redistribution of privilege and equal access opportunity across race, class, and gendered social structures of power.

Research evidence presented by Lichter and Landale, for instance, found that regardless of family arrangements and family work patterns, Latino poverty rates are significantly higher than non-Latinos. In terms of living arrangements (e.g. mother-headed, father-headed, married couples), poverty prevailed more in Latino children than non-Latino children. In terms of family work patterns (e.g. part-time, full-time, unemployed), poverty disparity is even higher (Lichter, Landale 1995: 350). Thus, Lichter and Landale concluded that Latinos' limited educational opportunities, in conjunction with racial and gendered discrimination, contributes to their social position as a minority-disadvantaged group (Lichter, Landale 1995: 353). The important point that this study confirms is that without a way to demystify the popular image of the U.S. as an equal opportunity, class- and color-blind society, it becomes much harder to debunk the idea that poorly socially located individuals and families *can* compete for resources under an unlevel playing field (Garey, Hansen 1998: xvii).

And still, the intersectionality approach presses privileged people for the validation of solutions, oppressed groups develop to overcome the structural barriers that constraint them (Lorber 2005: 201). While intersectionality approaches explore a few remedies *from above* to address the disadvantaged social position of Mexican families, specifically through public policy like affirmative action, many others come from below. For example, rather than being discouraged by limited access to institutional funding for entrepreneurial activities, it persuades immigrant communities to explore group-based resources as an innovative model to embark on business enterprises (Valdez 2016). Others, making a conscious sense of their positionality, use, resiliency and agency not only to negotiate access to better educational opportunities, but also to navigate the social structured hurdles of achieving educational success (Carrillo 2016).

4.4. Postmodern framework

Today, the U.S. family model differs from the one of 50 or 60 years ago. More divorces occur now than in the past, higher rates of families are led by single parents, gay and lesbian groups advocate for equal family rights, and more streams of immigration racially transform the composition of U.S. families (Coontz

1992). As Giddens suggests, because "[t]he family is a site for the struggles between tradition and modernity, but also a metaphor for them" (Giddens 2000: 53), family changes over time and across space are driven by economic, political, and social forces. And certainly, Mexican immigrants are not an exception to these structural family changes.

Without disregarding the relevance of the modern family type, based on family sex-role differentiation, emotional ties, nucleation of families, and family protection, Baca Zinn (2000) and Stacey (1990) however make a good case to explain the extent the modern family model has become an obsolete societal expectation. According to Stacey, the deindustrialization process and the inclusion of women in wage work gradually transformed the romanticized notion of the modern family based on instrumental and expressive roles. Or, as Kingsbury and Scanzoni (1993) point out, whereas the modern family guaranteed equilibrium, social order, and progress in society, its transformation from an ideal type of family evolved into a more fluid and dynamic concept of the postmodern family – "[…] diverse, fluid, and unresolved" (Stacey 1990: 17).

The postmodern approach's, as suggested by Baca Zinn (2000: 50), the central tenet focuses on family structures shaped by current postindustrial conditions, making the Mexican immigrant family increasingly visible, diverse, and fluid. Yet, to say that these dynamic immigrant family arrangements emerge strictly out of global transformations, it would require to accept a very deterministic theoretical position. Instead, relatively recent evidence reveals that geopolitical, social, and political developments among the U.S., Mexico, and Central American countries also contribute to the visibility of alternative living arrangements that highlight greater elasticity in families on the move (Bustamante 2007; Bustamante, Alemán 2007; Bustamante 2013; Guerrero 2017). And, as migration streams decrease and increase into the the U.S., the fundamental feature of the Mexican immigrant family lies in its capacity to transform and adapt to different social, legal, and economic environments – in forms of nuclear, extended, female- and male-led, binational, multinational, and transnational structures (Baca Zinn 2000: 50).

As migration policy agendas change in every presidential administration, a recent swell of literature related to the Mexican immigrant family reveals new insights about the elasticity immigrants must adopt to adapt their family structures not only to economic forces, but also to multiple individual and institutional forms of prejudice and discrimination (Bean et al. 2015; Bustamante 2013; Dreby 2015; Van Hook, Glick 2020).

Research by Bustamante (2013), for example, shows the ways familial ties across borders reconfigure immigrant family shapes. Through ethnographic evidence, this study confirms that the Mexican adoption of an alternative family model in the form of a transnational structure transpires as a response to the limited social and economic opportunities the U.S. offers to support immigrant families. In this way, the transnational family structure offers a new set of economic

opportunities for mobility, as well as new options to configure alternative living arrangements to have stable families.

Another important characteristic distinct of the immigrant family lies in its capacity to socially adapt to the hostile contexts of everyday life. A sad example of this resilient component became socially visible in the wake of the U.S. deportation regime (De Genova, Peutz 2010), when significant disruption of family life affected the Mexican community. Along this line of inquiry, Dreby's (2015) work has examined the effects of the deportation regime on family life. In this way, Dreby's argues that the migration policies produced (and enforced) across multiple levels of government not only separates immigrant families leaving children *fatherless* (and many times *parentless*), but also immigrant families are forced to reconfigure their arrangements in order to deal with separation, despair, and alienation. Given that the effects of a deportation regime still are applicable today, which seek to remove immigrants by repressive policies, the postmodern framework suggests to include the silenced voices of children, spouses, and family members as a way to confront what appears to be a white supremacist legal system.

Two important points that make the postmodern framework relevant to the Mexican immigrant experience lie not only in the extent they are affected by external societal changes and hostile public policies, but also in their capacity to adjust family arrangements while fostering a strong sense of resilience. More importantly, however, is to call attention to the collective condition of disrupted immigrant families in order to understand their struggle, as well as to develop new approaches from those silenced voices to foster change.

5. Mexican immigrant family research and family study

the significance of this review of the literature lies on two chronological, yet thematic narratives that outline the ways the Mexican immigrant family responds to larger social structure conditions by changing, adjusting, and adapting (or lack of thereof) their family configurations. From the early theoretical onset that placed the Mexican family as unwilling to assimilate into U.S. mainstream culture, in the 1990s, a relevant body of work emerged contesting stereotypical assumptions about the Mexican immigrant family in the confluence of assimilation and culture. As such, Portes and Zhou (1993) argue that although many immigrants experience upward mobility, many others, depending on different circumstances, may experience downward mobility perpetuating social inequalities. While this work debunks the notion of assimilation as a path to upward mobility, broadly speaking, it also demystifies the idea of the immigrant family as a culturally deficient entity.

Relevant insights from this literature, however, show that diverse patterns of domination in terms of race, class, and gender shape the social positions of

immigrant families by emphasizing subordination, marginality, and separation. This prompts a call to extend and refine conceptual perspectives to understand the immigrant family in its many forms, particularly, family perspectives that not only mirror demographic changes in the U.S., but also to challenge discourse narratives (and many times hostile public policies) that frame Mexican immigrant families as perpetual strangers, if not, outsiders. To be clear discourse, hostility toward the immigrant family is not something new. The novel aspect of this specific contemporary narrative lies on the extent politicians have weaponized anti-immigrant narratives against people from south of the U.S. border.

The negative public image of the Mexican immigrant family exploited by Donald Trump's during his 2016 campaign for the U.S. presidency transpires as a prime example. This time, political discourse did not only center on narratives associated with an unwilling Mexican position to assimilate. It alluded to 'otherness' components of the Mexican family to stereotypically position them as the *missing* link between crime and immigration. It can be also said that Trump's rhetoric did uncover *suspected* facets of moral sentiment against Mexicans, infamously amplified in one of his first political discourses,

> When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best… They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems… They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people (Donald Trump after Reilly 2016).

To some extent, with this shocking political statement, Donald Trump revealed the true nature of *a not so new* narrative of racial relations in the U.S. It suggested that as a society, we *should* not feel constrained to practice color-blind racism anymore (Bonilla-Silva 2006). It also confirmed the notion that we have lived for generations behind the façade of an implicit anti-immigrant and racist society. In doing so, it became legally okay during the Trump Administration to violently torn apart racialized immigrant families from south of the U.S. border.

Given this understanding, it is to some extent ironic, however, to see how mainstream news venues failed to recognize these political discourses against immigrant family life as a *not* new social phenomena *per se*. Therefore, as discussed through this comprehensive review, what it changed during this administration is that at least Trump's narratives and public policies exposed (and amplified) the social reality of Mexican families (and many other families of Latin American origin) living in the U.S.

While this critical review offers new insights about the adaptability qualities of the Mexican immigrant family, future research should underscore the effects of Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric and migration policy on immigrant family life. It may help us somehow to *problematizes* the vibrancy of the many family structures Mexicans adopt to confront adversity, a well as to produce a new body of work, which may offer a unique acumen about the social adaptability of the immigrant community.

Lastly, since this article primarily drew scholarship from a very specific group of immigrant families, Mexican, it makes comparisons with other immigrant families difficult. However, I am certain that analyses of other immigrant families would uncover a multitude of arrangements that comprise families from different perspectives.

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AMERYKAŃSKA MEKSYKAŃSKA RODZINA IMIGRANTÓW W ZMIENIAJĄCYM SIĘ SPOŁECZEŃSTWIE: KRYTYCZNY PRZEGLĄD

Abstrakt. Artykuł przedstawia przegląd literatury dotyczącej zmian strukturalnych meksykańskiej rodziny imigrantów w Stanach Zjednoczonych. Na początku zaprezentowano krytyczny przegląd klasycznej literatury na temat meksykańskiej rodziny imigrantów, skoncentrowanej na modelach asymilacji, ich głównych problemach i ograniczeniach. Następnie, przesuwając punkt ciężkości, w opracowaniu zaprezentowano, jak modele nierówności strukturalnych i feministycznych, jako krytyczne podejścia do pojawiających się form rodzinnych imigrantów, mogą pomóc w zrozumieniu transformacyjnych podobieństw między społeczeństwem amerykańskim a strukturą meksykańskiej rodziny imigrantów.

W artykule zaprezentowano argumenty odnoszące się do strukturalnego zróżnicowania meksykańskiej rodziny. W ten sposób dyskusja została usytuowana w szerszym amerykańskim kontekście, co zwraca uwagę na to, jak historyczne i obecne siły społeczne związane z nierównym dostępem do pracy i możliwości edukacyjnych utrwaliły marginalizację meksykańskiej rodziny imigrantów w stosunku do rodziny mainstreamowej. W tekście przedstawiono również i omówiono, w jaki sposób ramy feministyczne, przekrojowe i postmodernistyczne kształtują obecne debaty na temat rodzin imigrantów. Omówiono ponadto, jak różnorodność pod względem struktury rodziny i życia rodzinnego przyczynia się do rozwoju studiów rodzinnych zarówno w USA, jak i na całym świecie.

Słowa kluczowe: rodziny imigranckie, rodziny meksykańskie, rodziny amerykańskie.