



PROJECT MUSE®

Women's Work and Chicano Families

Patricia Zavella

Published by Cornell University Press

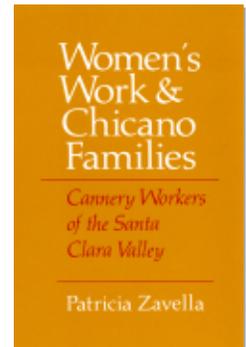
Zavella, Patricia.

Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley.

Cornell University Press, 1987.

Project MUSE., <a href="

<https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/57553>

Access provided at 6 Apr 2020 07:42 GMT with no institutional affiliation



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

“Everybody’s Trying to Survive”: The Impact of Women’s Employment on Chicano Families

Recent research on the impact of women’s employment on families indicates several patterns. Generally, working women gain status and influence in family decision making because of their financial contributions and enhance their families’ standard of living (Blood and Wolfe 1960; Safilios-Rothschild 1970; Nieva 1985). Yet despite these positive effects, working wives do not obtain significant help from their husbands with housework. Instead, women tend to add the time spent at work to the time spent on household chores, although working wives decrease the time spent in housework (Vanek 1974). Heidi Hartmann (1981a) has reviewed time-budget research on how much housework married men and women actually perform. She has shown that regardless of the class status of respondents, 70 percent of all housework is usually done by women—husbands and children each contribute about 15 percent—and wives are largely responsible for child care. Wives spend, on the average, forty hours a week maintaining a house and family if they do not work for wages and thirty hours a week if they do. Other research finds that husbands of working wives spend little more time (on the average, two hours a week) on housework than husbands of homemakers. Husbands’ proportion of family work does increase when wives work but “only because the wife does less” (Pleck 1979:484; also see Walshok 1979). However,

the amount of housework increases substantially if there are young children or many children in the household.¹ Clearly, "while husbands of employed wives participated more often than husbands of nonemployed wives in almost all household tasks, their contributions to the time spent on the tasks were small" (Hartmann 1981a:381).

Recent research on Chicano dual-worker families confirms that working women gain power in decision making but also implies that there is considerable sharing of household chores. Leonarda Ybarra (1982b) has found that Chicano husbands and wives have "egalitarian" attitudes on sharing household chores: 94 percent of her respondents agree that a husband should help his wife with housework if she is employed.² In terms of actual child-care tasks and housework, Ybarra has found that if a wife works, "the couple is more likely to practice egalitarian values" (1982b:174) and concluded: "If the wife was employed, there is a greater likelihood that household chores and child care would be shared between spouses, and that in general, they would have a more egalitarian role structure than couples where the wife was not employed" (1982b:169).

Zinn has also found that Chicano husbands of working wives are "involved" in domestic activities more than husbands of homemakers and that dual-worker couples have greater equality in conjugal decision making. Since the employed wives made and enforced the decision that husbands help with housework, "their husbands' participation reflects an important alteration in family roles" (1980:53). Zinn has admitted, however, that "the division of household labor was not equal" (1980:52). Since all of her informants subscribed to patriarchal ideology, she has suggested that individuals may adhere to some aspects of traditional family ideology but nevertheless experienced change in household behavior. This is an intriguing phenomenon that will be investigated further.

In family life, many assumptions about how one should behave are considered "natural," and as a result people usually do not spell out what "family" means to them. Our task is to discern the meaning of what are often cryptic or offhand remarks. I agree with Jane Collier

1. Wives spend perhaps eight hours a week in additional chores because of husbands (Hartmann 1981a).

2. Ybarra interviewed one hundred randomly selected Chicano married couples. "Egalitarian" families are "more democratically structured with husband and wife sharing family responsibilities equally" (1982a:34).

and her associates that "the meaning people attach to action, whether they view it as coordinated and therefore shared, or in some other way, is an integral component of that action and cannot be divorced from our analysis" (1982:37). Such a focus helps to clarify the processes of change occurring in Chicano families when wives enter the labor force. Conflict over women's labor is a key to analyzing power relations in the home and to understanding the degree to which men maintain control over women (Hartmann 1981a).

We also need to examine how coworker relationships affect such issues of change in Chicano families, a phenomenon that has been virtually overlooked by researchers. Regarding their participation in support networks, Chicanos are consistently found to rely on kin, maintaining ties through frequent visiting and the exchange of goods and labor. Chicanos are said to regard emotional support from relatives—especially primary kin—as superior to other sources (Gilbert 1978). Contrary to the predictions of classic acculturation theory, the longer Chicanos live in the United States, the more they intensify their kin support networks. The most "familistic" Chicanos, those with extensive kin relations, are the third generation in the United States and, among them, those of highest socioeconomic status. These cohorts of Chicanos tend to have more kin residing nearby and more resources to exchange with them.³ Chicanos are more "familistic" than Anglos or Blacks because they often have larger kin networks residing in the area and place higher values on closeness among relatives (Wagner and Schaffer 1980; Keefe 1984). Chicanos even tend to migrate to the areas where relatives reside in order to utilize their kin resources (Zinn 1982; Matthiasson 1974).

An implication of this research is that friendship is not considered to play an important part in Chicano support networks. In fact, some go as far as to claim that relatives are the primary source of support "because of the relatively low reliance of Mexican Americans on other informal resources such as fictive kin, friends, neighbors and coworkers" (Keefe, Padilla, and Carlos 1979:148).

My data show several related processes. Women informants and members of their families expressed patriarchal ideology in the way

3. These findings are the result of research on Chicanos' avoidance of mental health agencies, which is explained by institutional discrimination by agencies and Chicano cultural principles, which value seeking support from kin. See Keefe, Padilla, and Carlos 1978, 1979; Keefe 1979.

they divided housework. Women (and girls) performed most of the household chores, and men did not carry an equal load. In some of the women's families, there was tension or conflict over the household division of labor. Yet the meaning women ascribed to their situation as working mothers included acceptance of their primary responsibility as housekeepers and the need to adapt to the disruption of wage work. Furthermore, in contrast to research on Chicano networks, my informants developed work-related friendship networks, which functioned in a manner similar to kin networks, and these relationships were very meaningful to women.

Women's Perceptions

Consistent with the findings in the literature, the most noticeable change in perceptions that occurred among my informants was in regard to shared responsibility within families. The traditional patriarchal norms that characterized early married life became more flexible after the women began working. To the women, the fact that they were employed embodied a change in role expectations. Women believed that if they worked, they were easing the husbands' responsibilities as providers. They could therefore legitimately request that husbands reciprocate by doing more housework. Connie recalled: "I felt I was helping, taking some of the responsibility off him." María concurred: "I think if I help him out by going to work, then he can help me out around the house, and he can come and serve himself too." I asked when she started to think this way, and she exclaimed: "When I started to work. I had to; it was too much!" Yet she, like the other women, did not expect her husband to share housework equally.

The decision to continue working was faced anew each season (except for Connie who worked year around). In most cases, the woman announced that she got called back, and no objection was raised by her husband. Her family was used to her working and assumed she would continue to do so (even if they may not have liked it to begin with). The women asserted their own desire to continue working, although there were other factors causing them to remain in the labor force.

Most important was the higher standard of living that the women's income supported. Their income was pooled with that of their hus-

bands, and this brought benefits the whole family shared. With the second income, families became more stable economically, and this allowed a respite from the precarious situation the family was in before the wife worked. As a result, women generally had equal say in how money was spent.

The standard of living changed when wives worked; this is revealed in the women's comments on spending patterns.⁴ Blanca said, "At first I had to work. But after a few years it was so that we could pay a bill, get a little ahead." Women with children at home provided for their support. Lupe's wages were used primarily to pay for her children's education in Catholic schools. Lisa and Teresa, as well as other women, noted how the need to support their children was primary; yet their wages also enabled them to provide the "extras." As her youngest daughter toddled by, holding a doll that was almost her own size, Teresa remarked: "Por eso trabajo, para mi hijita, así que puedo darle esas cosas" (That's why I work, for my daughter, so I can give her those things). Even Cristina, who had no children, felt the need for two incomes. When her husband suggested that she quit because she was upset with the situation at work, she declined, saying: "If I had quit, then we wouldn't have the extra things. And with prices so high, you need the extra money." Connie observed: "We need to work because our husbands are older than us and maybe not in good health any more, and the doctor bills pile up, and the kids need to go to college. You know, the things of life that go on everyday—it takes money to live." María reiterated: "Both of you have to work to accomplish anything."

As their children grew up, women changed their spending patterns considerably from the days when they first began working. Rather than working to have wages for basic family maintenance, women later worked with specific goals in mind: to buy a color television or new draperies or to save so that their children could attend college. Luz was putting her youngest son through vocational school with her

4. In 1977–78, when these women were interviewed, inflation was high. The consumer price index was 7.7 in 1978 and rising (U.S. Bureau of Census 1982b). Unemployment rates were also relatively high in 1977–78 in California, with 7.1 percent for the total population and a 9.7 percent rate for Hispanics (according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics press releases in 1979). Yet unemployment rates had dropped from the highs of the 1974–75 recession (Bednarzik and St. Marie 1977:8).

income, and Rosa partially helped her daughter attend law school. Estela's son was in graduate school, and although she did not help him directly, her supervisor was able to get him a summer cannery job to pay for college expenses. Josie noted: "I used to spend my money on food. But I told my husband, 'You make enough for the food and house payments. I want to *see* what I work for.'" Euleria was proud of the well-furnished home and new patio, which had been paid for with her wages. Vicki also showed off her totally remodeled kitchen, which was paid for with her income. María laughed, "Now we have three cars and my relatives [in Mexico] think we're rich."

The women's families became financially secure with the dual incomes, especially when they were able to buy modest second homes for rental income. Vicki noted how inexpensive it was to purchase her home thirty years ago—it had cost only \$7,000.⁵ "I'm sorry I didn't grab two of them," she remarked. Vicki and her husband bought another small house after they paid off their first one, and the additional income from rentals made the Gutiérrezes relatively well off. They also owned a small ranch. Vicki explained: "We've been very good about putting our money away and investing our money wisely." They celebrated their tenth anniversary in the Hawaiian Islands and planned a trip to Mexico for their twentieth anniversary.

Celia da Silva worked primarily so that she and her husband could vacation, and they had been to Hawaii three times. After Celia said, "I'm bored with it," the following season they planned an extended cruise with two other couples in which the wives were also cannery workers: "Now I'm looking forward to *that*. It's what we work for, so why not?" Vicki and her husband were planning to join the da Silvas on the cruise, and he announced their upcoming vacation plans at a party with the rationale: "Why not? Vicki deserves it. I owe it all to her."

Vicki's income not only provided financial "rewards" but originally enabled her husband to get the vocational training he used to set up his own business. In addition, Vicki—who managed her income separately from that of her husband—felt free either to save or to spend her money. Some seasons she managed to save up to three thousand

5. The median price of homes in the San Jose metropolitan area was \$76,000 in 1978 and had risen to \$139,000 in 1985, the second highest area in the nation (*San Jose Mercury News*, 9 November 1985).

Impact of Women's Employment

dollars. Clearly, Vicki's financial contribution was substantial and aided her position in the marriage. Other women were also in this situation, in which their husbands had relatively stable jobs and their own income had become supplemental. In this regard, Celia remarked how "canneries have been good to us." I asked her to explain, and she replied: "Because of canneries we've been able to pay off our duplex, and we've been able to do okay." The more tangible rewards of the women's income were shared by husband and wife. The women's decision to remain in the labor force served both their interests.

Whether women used their earnings for basic support or as supplemental income, they had considerable say in how their money was spent. This gave them leverage within the relationship and brought the women personal satisfaction. Actually carrying out their egalitarian views in the division of labor, however, was harder to accomplish. As the Mexican saying goes, "Entre dicho y hecho hay gran trecho" (Between word and deed there is a great distance) (Ybarra and Arce 1981).

The Division of Housework

Except for Connie, who worked full time, and Lupe, who worked part time at a packing house, the women were housewives during the off-season. This is very important. Their families considered them, and even the women considered themselves, to be primarily homemakers. Yet the women characterized their homemaker duties in an offhand manner: "I just do my thing when I'm not working," Celia remarked. Estela shrugged: "I just clean my house, pay bills, take things easy." Connie laughingly characterized full-time homemaking: "Anyone likes to stay home and be lazy." Housekeeping was not seen in the same way as a job; although it was necessary, housework was not "work."

As the women went back to wage work each season, there was little impact on the division of household duties. My informants characterized two ways in which they shared housework, and these ways related to changes in the domestic cycle. The first pattern was segregated, in which the woman was seen as being primarily responsible for housework and the care of the children, despite the fact that she worked. These women carried the burden of the double day, often

because their children were young.⁶ Although husbands helped somewhat, most of the domestic chores fell directly on the women. About one-third of my informants were in this situation, in which they performed most of the housework. Similar to Leonarda Ybarra and Maxine Baca Zinn's findings, in two-thirds of the families the division of housework altered after the women began working.

Blanca was one of the women who was responsible for most of the housework. She described a typical evening after a grueling day in the cannery: "It's very hard. I have to come home and cook and clean, get my kids to bed, make food for the next day, and set out clean clothes for the kids." With a nervous glance to my notes, she added: "Then when it's after midnight and you finally go to bed, your husband has his things for you to do." I stopped taking notes as she continued: "The husband suffers the most, because he knows you have to take care of the kids first. Sometimes at night I'm too tired to take care of his comforts. Well, what can I do? That's life." Her husband, who happened to walk in during this part of the interview, listened to her comments and then agreed that this situation is difficult. He said, "Poor women, it's hard for them to have to work and then coming home to clean house too." Although I observed him taking care of his youngest daughter on various occasions, it was clear that his wife took care of the house.

Josie is another woman who did most of the housework. She shrugged: "Well, I didn't have any one [to help out] so I had to do it myself." Apparently, she did not rely on her husband when she needed help. Rosa described how she managed: "It's hard, especially when my kids were little, unless you have a husband who can start meals . . . [she shrugged]. Sunday is my only free day, and by the time you do your laundry and prepare for next week, your day is gone." María came home from work "knowing I had to start working right away." Estela said: "There's no effect on the family when I'm working, except for dinner time. All he wants is dinner when he comes home. So I have to come home and cook." Connie described her and Mario's division of labor: "I went in at night until seven in the morning. But it was a convenient shift for us. That way my

6. Boyd Rollins and Kenneth Cannon (1974) have found that marital satisfaction is lowest at those periods in the domestic cycle when "role strain" is the highest. For women, the early child-rearing phase is a time of highly demanding and intense social roles.

husband could sleep, be in with the children, and then I'd get home in time for him to go to work." I asked, "And then you'd sleep during the day?" She said, "Yeah, I'd try. Besides I had to clean house, wash clothes, cook dinner by the time the old man got home, make sure that the food was on the table, or else he'd get mad, go shopping, you know." I could not help but interject, "So you had two jobs?" She replied, "Oh, definitely, always." I pursued: "Other than taking care of the children, did your husband help around the house?" She shook her head. "Not much, not much." Since the women were part-time workers, it was easy for family members to ignore the disruption of their jobs and for household routines to proceed as usual. Myra Ferree (1976) has found that part-time women workers are more likely than full-time workers to be responsible for all of the housework. Thirty-six percent of the part-time workers in her sample of working-class women had husbands who did not customarily do any traditionally female chore.⁷

Even among the women who indicated that there was a shift in behavior, however, there was no fundamental redefinition of responsibility. Women were still seen as being chiefly responsible for housework, even if they were given more help. Rosa characterized the division of housework in her home during the cannery season: "My husband helps me more when I'm working, but everything runs the same." Estela smiled as she observed: "During the season it's different. The family pitches in. [But] the main change is in the dinner [hour]." So although families altered their schedules, and husbands and children helped more, there was no major change in responsibility.

Part of the difficulty in changing responsibility for home duties is that men limit the tasks they are able to perform. Some men are inept in homemaker skills, such as cooking. Euleria laughed as she recounted how her husband once tried to cook dinner and burned it terribly: "The kids wouldn't touch it, and that was the end of that." Sometimes Víctor would make dinner, but María explained: "It comes out awful! He made eggs and potatoes once, and the potatoes were all hard. The girls still tease him." Not surprisingly, it was the older children who assisted in household meal preparation.

7. Some recent research suggests that men believe they do more work when their wives are employed (Pleck 1979). Whether men actually contribute more remains to be documented by time-budget research.

Among children, gender often took precedence over age in the division of chores. Girls most often did the housework and cooking, even if they had older brothers. María's oldest sons were responsible for mowing the lawn and taking out the garbage. It was her fourth child, a girl, who was responsible for dishwashing and occasionally making meals. María elaborated: "Now I rely on la negra [nickname given the daughter]. She starts dinner and makes the tortillas." María's boys expected their sisters to iron their clothes, as well as to serve their meals. If María was late from work, her sons would not start dinner for the family but waited for their sisters to cook or for María to come home. Lupe is another example. Her youngest daughter did most of the daily dishwashing and table clearing, whereas her sons' chores included occasionally cleaning the yard or their rooms. Only if no females were available did boys work harder during the cannery season. Estela's oldest children were male: "My boys were real good; they helped a lot."

Even with daughters and sons helping, however, the allocation of duties to children did not insure that tasks were completed. Their "help" might create added frustration for working mothers. María sighed as she explained the difficulties of supervising children's chores:

Victor gets mad. He complains when the house is dirty. He says, "María it's your responsibility to see that it gets done. You don't have to do it, but at least get one of the girls to do it; just see that it gets done." I rely on them to help me out, they're old enough. But I don't like to be always telling them, "I want you to do this" or "haz me eso [do that for me]." So I just let it go or I do it myself. And sometimes it doesn't get done.

María was the one who used to mop her kitchen daily, but now "I don't know how long it's been since I mopped, probably weeks. Pues, ni modo [Well, never mind]."

The women who lived alone with their husbands had the most flexible division of labor, probably because there was less work to do. These women's husbands generally helped more and particularly did more housework during the canning season. Vicki admitted that when she is not working, she does most of the housework: "I spoil him; I wait on him hand and foot." But during the season: "He helps me with the chores. On his day off he'll barbecue or make something.

And he'll pick up around the house. I'll come home and my house is clean. And he'll throw a load of laundry into the washer. He says, 'If I can't throw a load in the washer—all it takes is to push a button.' He helps more when I'm working." Luz used to get up early and make her husband's lunch even though she worked late on the swing shift: "But one day I put on too much mustard, and it dripped on his shirt—he was so embarrassed! So I said, 'Well make it yourself.' So he does, and now he makes his own breakfast in the mornings while he makes his lunch." Cristina noted: "Hay hombres muy buenos para trabajar en la casa; puedan hacerlo. Mi esposo, sí me ayude" (There are men who are very good about doing housework; they can do it. My husband does help me). Celia appreciated her husband pitching in: "He helps me with the housework. When I'm working, he vacuums, puts clothes in the dryer, little things like that."

But even when husbands help out more, roles are not "egalitarian." From these informants' indications, the women are still responsible for completing the majority of household tasks. For example, Vicki's husband still "wouldn't allow" her to work full time, and she agreed to remain a part-time worker and housewife who "waits on him hand and foot." The segregated division of labor should not be surprising since it is a pattern that is found consistently in time-budget research (Hartmann 1981a; Nye 1974; Walshok 1979). I came across no families with an equal division of household labor and virtually no informants who characterized marriage in terms of equally shared responsibility for home duties. Connie came to see marriage as a "50-50 thing," but this was only after her divorce.

Women coped through various means with the difficulties of completing home duties when they worked. The task most disrupted was cooking dinner, since this chore was expected to be done by the "lady of the house." When working, women often resorted to purchasing prepared, fast-food meals, even though they were relatively expensive. Cristina admitted: "When I'm working, it's nothing but Kentucky Fried [Chicken]." Lupe described a second way of insuring that home cooked meals were ready by dinner time: "Everybody uses a crock pot in the cannery." This appliance enabled women to start a slow-cooking dinner before they left for work so that the food would be ready when they got home. María, on the other hand, changed her cooking style in the opposite direction: "I learned to cook dinner real fast, turn up the heat full blast so that everything would cook

fast. And if it was cooked right, good, if not: pues, ni modo [well, never mind].”

Finding time to get other housework completed was a more difficult matter. Because of fatigue during the season, many of the women were unable to keep their homes as clean as they would have liked. Women offered a litany of complaints. Josie said: “When I’m working, I just come home, make dinner, and get my clothes ready for the next day. That’s all you want to do. I do my housework on Sundays or late at night, but I let things go during season.” Gloria admitted that she hated housework because “it’s boring.” Her husband occasionally helped with housework but “not everyday.” She found it more convenient to ignore her tedious home chores during the season since “it’s hard to work and clean.” Estela complained: “Usually after work, I just come home. I’m tired. I don’t like to do nothing. I’m usually in bed by nine o’clock.” She said she resented this because during the season “I’m deprived of my TV.”

Teresa laughed, recalling changes since newlywed days: “Now I get frustrated with any little thing I have to do, or I make the girls do it. A veces me pone la flojera [Sometimes I just get lazy]. I don’t know why, I just say ‘Oh well, I don’t have to do it today.’” With six children—one was only eighteen months old—her “flojera” when it came to cleaning house was understandable. Cristina (who worked the swing shift) seemed embarrassed to admit: “No atiendo a mi casa. Si no tuviera tanto trabajo, sí lo hubiera. No tengo tiempo de hacer nada.” (I don’t attend to my house. If I didn’t have so much work, sure I’d do it. But I don’t have time to do anything.) Connie summarized women’s views about the division of labor during the canning season: “By the end of the season, you’re glad it’s over because it’s hard work and because you haven’t had time to really clean [house], and your husband is beginning to complain because all the meals are not on time, and the kids are beginning to complain because you can’t take them to the movies; you can’t take them anywhere.”

Women found time to finish the absolutely necessary chores by extending their day, either by going to bed late, getting up early, or doing both. María would iron and clean late at night because “I just didn’t have time in the day.” After working for as many as ten hours a day during the peak season, women were glad when the season ended. Lisa accurately summed up the meaning of the double day: “Women never stop working. It’s like having two jobs.”

Impact of Women's Employment

Women's views regarding the double day ranged from the practical María's—"I didn't mind; I knew I had to do it"—to the disgruntled Connie's—"never again." Connie realized she was always exhausted after working and then coming home to keep house. She described forcefully how she confronted the unfairness of the double day:

In those days, I was a fanatic! I never washed the floor. I got down on my hands and knees and scrubbed it. I used to wax the tiles on my bathroom walls with a toothbrush. . . . There's a little bit of a martyr in all of us. I remember one day I was tired. I got off work at seven A.M., after two shifts, and I came home. Before I went to sleep I asked my son and husband to wax the living-room floor. They said "OK," and I went to sleep. About one o'clock I got up and the floor was still unwaxed. I asked them again, and they said "OK," but first they had to watch the ball game. I kept worrying about that floor. So I got up, got down on my hands and knees, and did the floor. And I started crying—I felt so bad! I felt sorry for myself; here I was tired and had worked hard, and still I couldn't get any help. I was just bawling. And I decided that from that day forward I was never going to keep a spotless house again! Now I do what I have to, and my kids help me a lot, but I've got other things to do.

Other women in this situation, however, did not see themselves as martyrs. Blanca expressed the resignation that most women felt when she asked: "What can I do?" Gloria asserted, "It's not that bad." But another woman who accepted the double day was not passive regarding her husband's lack of support. When Víctor López complained that his food was not cooked right, María told me she had snapped: "Pues, si no te gusta, haz lo tú, o vete mejor" (Well, if you don't like it, make it yourself, or better yet leave). She laughed as she recalled, "So he didn't complain after that." Rosa best summed up the women's response to having to complete most of the housework after a day on the job: "Why, after all that, you're too pooped to poop."

Along with the responsibility for arranging child care, the double day places a great deal of strain on a woman. As we shall now see, this can affect her relationship with her husband.

Conflict and Adaptation

Although I did not seek out conflict in dual-worker marriages, the prevalence of underlying tensions and even outright struggle became apparent at the very start of the research. The full significance of that

conflict did not become clear to me, however, until after the fieldwork was completed. This was because of the mixed responses received from working women who tried to convey a positive impression regarding the impact of their jobs. Yet the deflection of questions with a defensive response of "it doesn't affect us" was itself an indication of hidden dynamics. It was not until subsequent interviews with a woman that my gentle probing, or her verbal slip, revealed a fuller picture. After I began the data analysis, I realized the extent to which conflict was a part of these women's family lives.

As we saw in the case of Gloria and Frank's argument (described in the preface), a disruption in social interaction also provided important information. During the interviews with Gloria, it became clear that the family depended upon her wages and unemployment benefits to get through the months when Frank was laid off from his construction job. Also, her income enabled them to buy a small second house, which they rented out for added income. From his response to my questions, it was clear that Frank worried about the possibility of Gloria losing her job. Yet he wanted a wife who was a full-time homemaker or who at least kept house the way he wanted it done.

We have seen how most informants desired the life-style of middle-class nuclear families in which wives did not work. The Gonzales were no exception. Because Gloria worked, Frank was continually reminded of his inability to support his family as he wanted. Her income, job satisfaction, and, most important, independence were threatening to him. The expense of paying a babysitter was an added problem. No doubt he did not realize that Gloria considered him "better than nothing" and was economically dependent on him also. Although Gloria claimed that her job "doesn't affect us, I'm home in the evenings," clearly it required an accommodation on Frank's part that he did not want to make. The tension sometimes erupted into open conflict, as when he accused Gloria of being "too lazy to clean."

If there was opposition to the woman's continuing to work, the conflict that resulted involved her domestic labor. Few couples explicitly discussed how they would change patterns of housework and child care when women began cannery work. Thus when expectations were not met, as in the case of Gloria and Frank, tensions surfaced. A woman's position in the domestic cycle created variations in the types of conflict between spouses. For those women whose children were grown, the conflict revolved around the lack of the woman's

Impact of Women's Employment

companionship and personal service. Rosa's husband originally did not want her to work because of the need for her at home with the children. Now that their three children were grown, he was more interested in their own relationship. She said: "He doesn't like me to work because I work nights and he works all day. He wants me to be around when he's home at night. He wants me to be pleasant and take care of him." Euleria's husband also preferred that she quit. Yet because he had had a minor heart attack, she began to save money in case he had to quit working. So when he suggested that she quit and spend more time at home, her response was: "How can I?"

Even in homes in which the husband or children did not particularly mind that women worked, tension was inevitable. Vicki remarked: "Sometimes there's squabbles at work, and I come home tired or angry, and I take it out on him. He says, 'Well you know you don't have to work, nobody's forcing you. You can quit anytime.' But I don't want to." Vicki noted that even her son, who had worked one season in the cannery, suggested she quit. He asked, "Mother, how can you stand it?" Vicki had lectured him: "Now you know the opportunities you've had; take advantage of them so you won't have to work in the cannery."

For women who had school-age children, it was difficult to manage the pressures of work and family duties. Lupe described her husband's feelings about her job: "He didn't want me to continue working because he'd say, 'You're so grouchy when you're working. You yell at the kids and just are not a pleasant person to be around.'" With a wary glance at my note pad, she said, "And you don't need to put this down." So I stopped writing and listened as she continued: "And sometimes I'm too tired and our sex life suffers. And that's so important to a man; no matter what anybody says, that's one of the most important things in a marriage. If that's no good, then nothing's good." But she continued working despite her husband's complaints.

Discord also arose from expectations over who would do the housework. Husbands and children resented having to do more around the house. When Lupe asked her daughter (who happened to be nearby during one of our interviews) how she felt about the fact that Lupe worked, Linda exploded: "I hated it! I didn't like you working nights. The man should bring in the money. I didn't like the babysitters; one ran over my cat." Linda's resentment also stemmed from the fact that despite being younger than her two brothers, she had to do more

housework while her mother worked. A surprised Lupe had not known her daughter felt that way. When a woman's job is important to family income, such feelings of resentment are not often expressed.

Blanca's husband, who originally did not want her to work, later decided she should continue her seasonal job. But Blanca wanted to quit because a work injury bothered her. She melodramatically announced "I want to die in my own home" and vowed never to return to the cannery. Jaime left the decision up to her. After he left the room, Blanca said: "I can't tell you everything. But sometimes you need your husband more . . . [pause]. I already told him that I can't work and I won't work. And if he doesn't like it, there's the door; he can walk out like a free man. I can't do it anymore." I dropped the issue. Later I found out that Blanca had returned to the cannery for "just one more season."

Connie's husband originally did not seem to mind that she worked. Later he became critical after she decided to let go of her "fanaticism" for cleaning. Also, the fact that she refused to provide personal attention became a major point of contention in their deteriorating relationship. When I asked how Mario felt about her change, she waved her hand in disgust and said, "Mmm, ¿pa' qué te digo?" I pressed her: "He didn't like it?" She described the painful marital discord that even included the children:

Later Mario used that against me. He'd say: "I don't want to stick around here 'cause it's like a pigsty." I'd look around, and the house was clean. And he'd say things like: "My mother used to work in the cannery, and my shirts were always clean and ironed." So I'd wonder, "Well, maybe he's right, what's wrong with me?" After a while he stopped asking me to do things; he'd ask the kids. He'd get back at me through them. I told them, "Don't do it; he's a grown man; he's healthy; he can do it himself." My daughter would say, "Momma, he's my father. It's all right, I'll do it." Sometimes the kid was so little they'd have to get a chair to get him a glass of water, but they'd do it.

Apparently, Mario expected the household routine to remain the same, and he even hoped for some lavish attention. When Connie not only lowered her standards of housekeeping but refused to defer to him, Mario accused her of being a poor wife. Connie, on the other hand, had different expectations. She felt good about working and

the fact that she was helping to ease his burden as provider. After she decided not to worry about housework, she had few concerns about neglecting their family. However, when Mario criticized her behavior, she felt guilty and wondered if indeed she was doing the right thing.

If men accept the notion that they are entitled to respect by virtue of the breadwinner role, working wives who contribute a third or more of the family income can seem threatening.⁸ When a woman asserts herself, as Connie did, her husband is in a vulnerable position. Not only has he lost personal service and deference, but he cannot adequately care for himself. Women, on the other hand, can be even more vulnerable. With only seasonal jobs to support their families, women need husbands' incomes. It is in both of their interests to resolve the conflict.

There were two main ways that couples managed the tensions generated by the woman's job. One way was for the woman to quit working, either to save the marriage or end at least this particular source of strain. After much conflict, María and Víctor finally agreed that despite their need for a second income, the best thing would be for her to quit after one more season. It was originally María's decision, since she did not like her job. She announced several times that she would not return to work with no response from Víctor. At last he announced his acquiescence: "Pues, ni modo" (Well, all right). The rationale was that the children needed María at home, and Víctor preferred that she make his meals and take care of family matters. María's reason for "their" decision was: "El me tiene mantener" (He is supposed to support me).

Connie and Mario found an extreme way to cope with their marital conflict. Mario resented Connie's refusal to be the perfect homemaker. His inability to accept her political activism prompted him to demand that she quit organizing. Connie refused, and they remained deadlocked for many months. During this time Mario's drinking increased, and he became estranged from the whole family. Connie recalled: "And I realized that even though I still loved him, I didn't

8. Lillian Rubin has found that in more than a third of her sample of working-class families, husbands complained that working wives were getting too independent (1976:176). A national survey revealed that more than one-third of all workers living in families experienced either moderate or severe work-family conflict, with women and men reporting conflict in equal numbers (Pleck, Staines, and Lang 1980).

like him. We didn't have anything in common. . . . When I was little, I never had a father, and I wanted a family so much, so I tried to keep the marriage together for the kids, so they wouldn't come from a broken home." Connie believed that her political activities, although perhaps exacerbating her marital problems, were not their cause. She said: "It wasn't that my working hastened my divorce, in that it made my marriage worse, like Mario claims to this day. But rather it all allowed me the *freedom* from a bad marriage." Nevertheless, the decision to divorce was difficult and painful.

Connie is an unusual woman. Very few women cannery workers had received full-time jobs since the Conciliation Agreement and were therefore in a position to support families on their own. Female single parents are likely to become impoverished after divorce: Families of women raising children alone are five times more likely to be poor as are families with a man present.⁹ Seeking a divorce is an option that few working-class women with children can afford.

Women's employment did not create discord in all marriages. Most families accepted the temporary changes in their lives when wives worked in canneries. Couples with grown children had the easiest time adapting. We have seen how Vicki's spouse did not particularly mind that she worked. After their son left home, her job was even less of a disruption. Luz's husband originally did not want her to work, but he adjusted: "Now he doesn't mind; he expects it." Estela's husband did not want her to work on the swing shift because "then we couldn't go out; we couldn't be together." As long as she worked the day shift, "he likes it. We want to spend money and have a good time, to party." Clearly, these women had great influence with their husbands.

Lupe and her husband finally agreed that she would work until her retirement, since his health was deteriorating, and he needed to retire early. He grudgingly accepted her seasonal grouchiness. When people are forced into a situation they do not want, because of the need for extra income, it's understandable that they are resigned, as was Blanca: "What can I do? That's life."

In sum, the division of labor fluctuated in concert with the work season and evolved as families went through the domestic cycle.

9. National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity, "Critical Choices for the Eighties," 1980, cited in Power 1984. Also see Pearce 1979, *Economic and Social Opportunities* 1974.

Impact of Women's Employment

When the children were young or during the off-season, women performed most of the home work. Men's ineptness or refusals to carry out their share of the load and women's attempts to be model homemakers were contributing factors. Both were reflections of the notion that housework is "women's work." By the time the children were older or grown, or during the cannery season, men helped out more. Even though women received help from husbands and children, it is clear that these women were performing most of the household chores. By participating in long-term cannery employment, they were able to return to homemaking for most of the year, and this facilitated the maintenance of a traditional division of labor.

Work-related Networks

The relationships women established on the job, in what I call "work-related networks," also had an impact on family life. For the most part, work-related friendships started with social motivations, and women visited with one another during the off-season (roughly from October through May). The women visited in each other's homes, telephoned several times during the week, went shopping or to lunch, or went out for drinks. Connie described how work-based networks evolved into work-related networks: "I don't know how many times I remember telling a coworker that I became particularly fond of, 'Hey I'll be sure to come and see you after the season.' I never made it because I have kids to raise, things to do, and I just never got around to it. And then there are others, like Elena, that you become so involved with and become very dear friends." Whereas women initiated these activities with coworkers, once they were established the networks also included husbands. Cannery workers occasionally got together as couples for parties, barbecues, short weekend trips, or even extended vacations. Some of my informants organized large-scale activities in which a number of cannery-worker couples and their kin and friends participated.

The structure of work-related networks varied between two poles. On one end were friendship networks, which were composed entirely of unrelated coworkers, and at the opposite extreme were kin-dominant networks (Graves and Graves 1980). Connie, for example, had a friendship network consisting of about twelve women who started

working when she did. "The majority of my friends are people who work at the cannery," she said. Kin-dominant networks were composed almost entirely of cannery workers who were relatives. In many cases married couples had first met one another at the cannery, and it was common for women's children to work at least one season in the cannery before moving on to better jobs. Women in these situations usually had work-related networks in which kin predominated, and networks included members of their own nuclear families. The following description of Vicki's work-related network shows the dense set of kin relationships at its center.

The core members were three sisters, all of whom were permanent seasonal cannery workers. Two of the sisters, Vicki and Estela, worked in the same plant, as did Estela's son for two seasons while he was a college student; Vicki's son also worked one season at the same cannery. A fourth sister, Marylou Johnson, was a seasonal cannery worker too. She was married to an Anglo who was a superintendent at a plant in another county. Because of these circumstances, Marylou was a marginal member of the network. Estela's niece Sally also worked a season in the cannery but quit when her daughter was born. Sally's husband's mother worked seasonally in canneries for fifteen years. (The grandmother's income supported her family for two years while they established a small business. When the business started thriving, the grandmother quit.) Estela's *comadre* Celia da Silva was a friend from work; she and her husband, Manuel (who is Portuguese-American), stood as godparents at the baptism of Estela's daughter, who was named after Celia. Jean Pascual, a Portuguese-American, was the head floorlady where Vicki and Estela worked; her husband was an engineer, and they were also on the fringe of the network. Other women friends and their husbands were part of the network, including informant Luz Gálvez.

The presence of kin in the area who were also cannery workers, however, did not mean that kin and friendship networks necessarily coincided. Lisa considered herself "a third-generation cannery worker." Many of her relatives had been cannery workers, most at the same plant. Besides her mother (who had worked for thirty-five years) and her stepfather (who had twenty-seven years in the same cannery), she had a great uncle who had worked fifty years in the cannery (since the age of fifteen) and had recently retired and three aunts who continued to work there: "The Hernández sisters are

famous; everyone knows them.” Two other cousins had recently dropped out of high school and “they will be cannery workers; they will carry on that way of life.” Lisa, however, did not consider her cannery-worker relatives part of her friendship network. She had different political values and other interests. She considered herself outside of cannery-worker culture.

Regardless of whether they were recent immigrants from Mexico or third-generation Chicanas, women who did not have kin residing in the area developed work networks composed of unrelated friends. Most of Blanca, Teresa, Euleria, and Cristina's kin resided in Mexico, and these women had only friends in their cannery networks. Rosa, Luz, and Gloria had kin residing in the area, but their kin and work-related networks were separate. Gloria socialized mainly with her kin and neighbors; she had three sisters, eight cousins, and a grandmother who lived in San Jose. Gloria did not want to be “bugged” to socialize with coworkers: “We are friends while at work.” Besides, she believed: “My time at home is just for my family.”

Work-related networks varied in the number of members, and several were “close knit.” This was because some of the women's friends were also *comadres* with one another, through Catholic baptismal rites.¹⁰ Usually, a woman chose a friend and her spouse to sponsor a child at baptism with the intention of honoring them and solidifying the friendship (Carlos 1972). The presence of fictive kin among coworkers blurs the distinction between friendship and kin networks but adds to their cohesiveness.¹¹

The women themselves organized activities and kept the networks active by communicating with one another. A few women were core members, and they either organized get-togethers or were honored on special occasions. For example, Estela gave a party in honor of Vicki's birthday and Celia and Manuel's twentieth wedding anniversary. Of the fifty or so people who were present, virtually everyone (except myself) was either a cannery worker or related to a cannery

10. Women can also become *comadres* when their children marry one another or when they sponsor children at other Catholic rites such as First Holy Communion or Confirmation.

11. In network terminology, these personal networks are relatively dense and homogeneous since they include mostly working-class Chicanos and are multiplex in content since members participate as workers, friends, and even kin. See Hanerz 1980.

worker. The women had organized the party and had urged everyone to enjoy the festivities while they served the food. The men clustered together near the keg of beer, and the women sat in little groups around tables heaped with Mexican dishes, vegetables, and dips. A handful of *comadres* who had worked together for two decades sat in one corner. They gossiped and laughed over various incidents that had occurred throughout the years. I was introduced as someone writing a book on cannery workers, and several women giggled nervously. One woman was introduced to me as "la veterana" (the veteran), as she had worked in canneries since the age of fourteen. But she did not even want to discuss it. She shook her head and waved her hand as we all laughed in understanding: "¿Pa' que te digo?" (Why should I tell you?) As a small Mexican band retired, the phonograph was turned on, and the women pulled men onto the dance floor. Couples danced to old Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey records. Vicki's husband took advantage of a break in the music to toast Vicki and announce their upcoming vacation plans—two other cannery couples, including the da Silvas, were going on a cruise with the Gutiérrizes after "the season" to celebrate their upcoming wedding anniversary.

In many ways work-related networks also operated like kin networks and served as sources of exchange. Network members were good sources of information regarding problems that arose from their work situation. Women found babysitters through their networks or learned how to qualify for unemployment or claim disability pay from coworkers. Work friends were also sources of emotional support, and women discussed work and personal problems, especially those concerning their children. They frequently sought out a work friend when they needed to talk and greatly appreciated such support. Connie observed of her friend from work: "If I needed her, she was there. When I get real down, she is my moral support. Everyone needs someone like that."

Work-related networks also operated in more political ways. The lack of job mobility and unwillingness of the union to meet the special needs of Chicano workers spurred some women into labor organizing. Although only a handful of my informants were politically active, their friends and kin were often also involved in organizing. In some instances, work-related networks became politicized after they were well established as social networks. Connie and her friends

Impact of Women's Employment

met frequently, and the conversation inevitably turned to work. They began to devise ways of changing working conditions. After the calloused rebuffs from male union officials, the women decided to organize women workers themselves. They founded a women's caucus (which also included black and Anglo women) and filed a complaint with the Fair Employment Practices Commission. They later became plaintiffs in a lawsuit against California Processors, Inc. In addition, these women wrote articles for a cannery-worker newsletter, and one woman ran for president of the local. Her friends served as campaign manager and volunteers in a bitter election that was narrowly lost. The friendship network evolved into a militant organization.

Political activists' work friends became important in personal ways as well. Many of the women activists had conflicts with their husbands over their political involvement. Husbands complained that organizing took up too much time and that the women were neglecting their families. Indeed, one woman organizer claimed that reluctant husbands were the biggest obstacles to organizing women. Some of these husbands demanded that their wives either stop organizing or restrict their political activities to times that were convenient for their families. Several of the activists eventually divorced their spouses, partially because of their husbands' opposition to their political activism. Most of these women had attained better-paying jobs and were in a position to leave poor marriages. Connie observed: "Once my friends got better jobs so they could support themselves and their families, they didn't have to take that crap!" Work friendships served as a crucial means of support to these women. Connie stated: "I don't know how I would have *survived* without my friends."

A few women intensified their relationships with their husbands through their political activism. These couples got involved with the dissident union caucuses, whose membership was predominantly male. Through the contacts made during political activities, these wives' work networks enlarged. Daniel and Lucinda Rodríguez and Blanca and Jaime Ramírez had each been involved in political organizing for almost a decade. For these couples, politics often involved socializing. They attended fund-raising activities such as dances with other couples in their network and socialized after meetings, leafletting, or tending booths at political events. Friends from work were more than coworkers or *compadres*.¹² They were political allies who

12. The term *compadres* can refer to the father and godfather of a child or to parents and godparents of both sexes.

shared all the frustrations and camaraderie of labor organizing. Even though these activities were often divided by gender, their wider purposes did bring couples together.

Work-related networks also provided pressure for women to accept unfair working conditions. Lisa Hernández avoided visiting her mother during the work season because the job harassment her mother received became increasingly difficult for Lisa to bear. She had advised her mother to talk with a lawyer and explore the possibility of legal action to stop the harassment, but Lisa's mother refused. Lisa believed her mother would not seek legal redress because of the advice of an older sister who was married to a foreman at the plant where Lisa's mother worked. The aunt discouraged her sister from taking any action that might jeopardize her husband's position as foreman. None of the other relatives working at the plant opposed the aunt's advice, so Mrs. Hernández continued working under stressful conditions. Lisa shrugged: "The cannery is a way of life. You live in it and thrive on it."

Whether or not they involved politics, work friendships were important to most cannery women. Especially as their children either left home or no longer required so much attention, women had more time and desire to socialize.¹³ Once home responsibilities had decreased and financial obligations for their children were not as pressing, the meaning of the job changed for these women. They felt isolated at home and longed for social contact. Few women saw housework as meaningful in its own right. If the children were grown, not only was there little housework to do, but "housework will always be there"—it could be put off.

Middle-aged women's social needs were different from those they had when they began working and when their children were young. Vicki explained: "I don't have to work anymore; we don't need the money. But if I stay home, all I'll do is watch TV and get fat. I don't have anything to do. There's not really much housework. No way! No way am I going to stay home! I'm going to go work. Plus the extra money is always helpful." Celia said, "You look forward to another season." Josie remarked, "I'm never happier than when I'm surrounded by a bunch of people who know what I'm talking about and

13. Lillian Rubin (1979) has criticized the notion of "the empty-nest syndrome" in which middle-aged women are said to experience crisis after their children leave home. Instead, her informants found new meaning in life after their children left home by taking on careers, seeking education, or participating in social relationships.

we can relate to each other.” Connie observed: “Most of the women my age [forty-four] who work in the industry, their kids are all grown. They’ve got grandkids already. So their life is just cannery. The people they associate with are cannery workers; they can’t see beyond anything else that has to do with the cannery.” The cannery provided these women with an escape from the isolation of homemaking. Work-related networks became the focus of their social lives.

Women’s longevity on the job allowed friendships to endure. Especially if they were *comadres*, women could feel free to develop *confianza* (trust usually reserved for kin) with coworkers. Women whose networks included only friends often characterized the relationships in kinship terms. Connie remarked, “I don’t know what I’d do without her; she’s been like a sister to me.” Vicki described her work-related network: “It’s like a little happy family.” Clearly, friendship networks were serving needs that kin networks typically provide.

The Meaning of Women’s Employment

There is variation in how women felt about being working mothers. The women who had small children generally did not like the fact that they worked. Women whose children were grown tended to focus on the positive relationships they sustained through work and on how a second income allowed them a more relaxed life. In addition, the salience of their identity as workers varied in intensity. Some women were wives and mothers first, and they considered their jobs of secondary importance. Others saw their jobs as central to their sense of themselves.

Luz was among the women who were content with their situations. She summed up her feelings about working: “I’m satisfied. It was good in the winter months, I could take the kids to school. You work hard, but you get used to it. The cannery is not the place to be all the time. You make good money, but they’re closing.” She offered her rationale for continuing to work: “Why not? The kids are gone, there’s nothing for me to do at home, and I like my job. This is all I know.” Rosa was also satisfied: “I only work for three months, my husband helps with the housework, and I enjoy the pool and rest.” Celia noted: “It’s good to get out in the public, to talk with people. I just feel lucky to have a job.” Lisa observed that work facilitated

marital communication and therefore had a beneficial effect on her parents' marriage: "During the season my parents' relationship becomes super close. It's like a whole new romance, no matter how tired they are. The cannery is all they talk about. When they hassle my mom, they talk it over and it brings them closer. It brings them together because they are in the same situation." She believed these reasons prompted her mother to continue to work, and noted: "They won't say anything [that is critical]; that's their whole life. Because of the cannery they have two houses, three cars; they put their kids through college. According to them, they owe at least loyalty to the cannery." Some of the women who were satisfied did not attach much significance to their status as workers. Estela said: "I just go to work; I just get my check. That's all I want." Euleria conceded: "It's all right if you work until five o'clock. But ya [enough], after five is too much."

Two women had negative assessments of how working affects their families. Blanca resented that she had to continue to work and that because of this she was forced to neglect her children and husband. Her youngest daughter was frail and sickly. She required much patience and attention from Blanca and from the older children who cared for the child after they got out of school. Blanca was bitter: "To me working is a big sacrifice; it costs me a lot to continue to work. It's very difficult. The children suffer a lot, but my husband suffers the most. And I hate to leave my children with a sitter. After all those years of working, I'm worse off." Lisa was in similar circumstances, with three preschool-age children. The difficulties of arranging child care and her worries about leaving them made her decide to quit work. She contrasted her situation with that of her parents: "I would not stay there. It's a lot of money, but it's terrible; it's wet and dirty and awful. To them [relatives] it's a way of life; they've done it for so long. But to me it's horrible." The fact that she hated cannery work made the decision to quit easier. Like Blanca, Lisa considered work too much of a sacrifice.¹⁴

14. These women's responses are similar to Leonarda Ybarra's (1982b:175) findings. Almost 30 percent of her Chicano dual-worker respondents believe that the "effects of the wife working" are negative, 26 percent believe that the woman's employment has no effect, 24 percent state that the wife's employment has both negative and positive effects, and 20 percent believe that the wife's employment has a positive effect.

Other women were ambivalent about working. They thought that employment brought many benefits to them personally, but they worried about the effects on their families, especially when the children were young. During the first interview, Vicki had a positive view about working: "It was easy to get hired; nobody bothers you, you make good money, you have unemployment and can be with your family in the winter months." But at the end of the interview she commented: "The family really suffers a lot." She did not elaborate and quickly changed the subject. When I raised the issue during our next interview, she denied that working had any negative effect on her family. Later, after I had described my own difficulties in finding a job, she offered advice and then opened up. She reversed her earlier position and expanded on the negative effects of work on family life. When her son was a teenager, he ran away from home several times and had problems with drugs. Vicki and her husband were very confused and hurt by this since they had tried to provide the best for him. She lamented, "They want more; they want to grow up too fast. They're spoiled." Besides, "all these kids don't have anything to do," and so they spend their free time "looking for trouble." Vicki noted how different this was from when she was a teenager. She recalled her own hard work in the fields—"It was beautiful."

Vicki believed that the fact that she worked had not been detrimental because she did not work full time. Yet she felt guilty that somehow she had failed her son since she was not home in the afternoon when he arrived from school. After we discussed her son's problems, Vicki provided a more sober perspective about working: "I really don't mind, as long as I have my health and all my friends are there. It's really ideal. It's good for a woman to get out. I'm comfortable there." Then she echoed the refrain of several other women: "This is all I know." To Vicki, the relationships she sustained through work allowed some release from the pain at home. Yet she did not want a full-time job: "I like some free time and to draw my unemployment. I get about twenty-four hundred dollars, and that's tax free. You can't beat that for not working." Like other women, she did not consider her home duties as "work."

Lupe is another woman who had mixed feelings about working. She liked the fact that she worked part time and could spend the school-year months with her children. Yet she worried about them being alone and her family's inability to spend time together during

the summer: "The part I hate the most is sometimes you have to work ten hours, six to seven days a week. We like to go camping. All these summers I've missed that part." Lupe and her husband had recently separated. Since she now had sole responsibility for supporting her children, she wished she had a different job: "You should set a better example for your kids; they're going to follow your tracks. I wish I had stuck to other kinds of jobs [she has had various clerical jobs]. I'd like to start a business." Lupe hoped to send her children to college so that they would have more opportunities than she had found. She summed up her views on working in the following manner: "It's not so bad. Everybody's trying to survive. You work so your kids will have it better. I don't want them to be cannery workers. I want them to be somebody. That's life, huh? You want your kids to have better. They're my whole world." Many other women echoed her sentiments and pinned their hopes on a better future for their children.

Gloria's contradictory views were more pronounced. The first time I asked her "how do you feel about your job?" she shrugged, "It's all right." She elaborated: "It pays better; you have more time at home. It makes sense." Recall her independent views about women working: "Women *should* work outside the home, see what they can do for themselves. If they don't like it, they can quit, but they can do for themselves. It brings you satisfaction to earn your own money when you're old and your husband is gone." When I asked how having a job affected her family, Gloria denied there was any effect at all: "There's none." Yet as she continued, a defensive edge came into her voice: "I feel I'm a good mother—although too soft, too lenient. But I try." With a toss of her head she emphasized: "My family comes first." I sensed that she felt that even asking this question was a presumption on my part, for of course she could be a good mother despite the fact that she worked. My question implied that she might be neglecting her family. Her husband's presence and criticisms no doubt added to her unease in discussing this issue. During the second interview when we were alone, she admitted: "It's not really good. I miss staying home with the children in the summer. They understand that if I don't work they don't get the extras. But it's hard for a person to work all the time. You have no time when you can relax once in awhile." Gloria's strategy was to continue working for another season despite her husband's objections. With the rental income, her small pension, and her husband's wages (who, after all, was "better than

Impact of Women's Employment

nothing”), Gloria would be allowed the rest she desired after retirement.

Connie was the most reflective woman I interviewed. She observed various changes in her life as a result of her working status. The most noticeable impact was on her children. Connie took pride in her children's self-reliance and flexibility regarding gender roles: “My children mean the world to me. I love them very much. But I raised them to be independent. They love me but they don't need me. They can get along by themselves if they have to. Even my son, they keep this place spotless.” Because she worked, there even had been a beneficial effect on her relationship with Mario: “My ex-husband works at a cannery. And I could sit down with him and his friends when they were talking and playing cards, and I understood what they were talking about—you know, they fixed this machinery or the fork lift did that. And I wasn't bored; I mean I could relate to what they were saying.” As we have seen, Connie was very critical of working conditions and how the union handled complaints. I asked her about the possibility of leaving the cannery. She laughed and dismissed the idea:

Sure I could get a different job. I was the head of inventory; I've worked as a sales clerk. But I've worked in the cannery for so many years. Eighteen years is a long time. It would be very hard to adjust. I know everybody at the cannery. I've been there for so long that I know everything, how the whole place runs. And besides, I could never live off a salary of a secretary. I couldn't support my family. I *need* a man's wages.

During a later interview she was more agitated: “Where would I go? Cannery work is all I know! And at my age [forty-four] what can I do? For us women, this is all we know.” At the end of our last interview, Connie was philosophical after reflecting on the pain of divorce and the insults she endured in her struggles to organize workers. She recalled that a coworker had observed that she was bitter. Connie had replied: “I'm not bitter, I'm resentful. Being bitter is when you expect the world to hand you a living; being resentful is when the world expects certain things from you because of who you are, because you're Mexican or a woman. There's a big difference! Nobody understands the anger that I feel.” Angry and resentful, resigned to remain in the cannery, Connie summed up her goals in life: “All I want is a

good home for my kids, what I can afford to give them, and love. I wish I had raised my kids to be more loving.”

Conclusion

There were several changes occurring within the families of these women. Probably the most radical change was a shift in the family budget from working members pooling their income for family maintenance to the women reserving portions of their wages for luxury items and leisure activities. The data also reveal the economic vulnerability of women workers. Women did not make enough to support themselves and the children remaining in the household. Women's seasonal jobs significantly increased the standard of living and increased their autonomy, but it was still necessary to pool cannery income with a husband's earnings to maintain their families. By continuing in seasonal cannery jobs, women preserved their economic dependence on their husbands.

Christine Oppong (1974) has argued convincingly that the competing interests of wives and their husbands' matrikin (female relatives on his mother's side) are the basis of much conjugal conflict among urban elites in Ghana. My data also show that conjugal conflict stems from competing interests; however, for my informants, the conflict was over the use of women's time and labor. Husbands' interests were in women continuing to provide personal service to them, whereas women favored more autonomy. Because women were considered primarily as homemakers who happened to work, husbands (and even children) expected the women to continue deferring to them and maintaining the needs of family members. When women contested these assumptions, conflict emerged.

Regarding family ideology, women came to see the need for providing material support for their families as a joint responsibility. In some instances, especially when they started on the job, there was little choice. But after a time, many of the women no longer had to work for the sake of their children. Now, they indicated, they worked to provide a higher standard of living. Tied to these shifts in perceptions about family responsibility was the notion that the domestic division of labor should change as well. Women decided that husbands and children should help at home while the women worked.

Impact of Women's Employment

Yet most women continued viewing primary responsibility for household work as theirs. Their expectations of help at home varied during the year—they expected more when they were at work in the canneries and less when they were “unemployed” during the rest of the year. But even when they received the help they desired, women admitted to putting in long days. These families could not be considered egalitarian. Some couples were involved in marital conflict, as husbands attempted to enforce their standards of housekeeping or preferences regarding whether women should work and women resisted. There was also a shift on the women’s part from nurturing children to providing services to husbands, as children matured and left home and husbands aged. Women’s values concerning children were consistent. They believed the children’s needs should receive priority, and mothers should sacrifice their own needs for their children. Women saw their wage work as a way of providing more educational opportunities for their children, who they hoped would enjoy some upward social mobility in the next generation.

The data on women’s networks indicate several processes. The networks appear “women centered” (Yanagisako 1977); that is, women were the organizers and nurturers and members of network activities. Friendships established at work were clearly important to my informants. Women’s work friends were in similar situations, and therefore they could understand each other’s problems. My data do not contradict the familistic behavior previously reported for Chicanos. Rather, women enlarged support networks to include friends from work. Those Chicanas who had nearby relatives relied on kin and friends; those who did not relied on friends. I suggest that friendship networks are more important than previously noted and that we examine the conditions under which Chicanos expand kinship networks to include friends, work mates, and neighbors.¹⁵

Women who had kin-dominant networks tended to integrate friends into kinship activities and to regard friends as surrogate kin. In some cases, after as much as two-and-a-half decades of working in the same factory, women’s coworkers indeed became “like family.” Whether women had kin- or friend-dominated work networks, the

15. Interviews with young, married Chicana electronics and apparel factory workers (Zavella 1983) show that women not only valued work friendships highly but at times preferred discussing sensitive matters with friends rather than kin because friends were socially distant and would not get involved in the problems.

conditions in which networks were established and maintained account for the fact that networks endured. The conditions on the job allowed limited social interaction with coworker friends, and so women engaged in social activities with work friends outside the factories. Furthermore, women's extended kin did not seem to place an economic drain on the women. Therefore, these women focused on socializing with kin, and this facilitated the inclusion of kin and friends in networks.

The women's statements revealed a construction of the meaning of family that contrasted with the meaning of work. Contrary to the Japanese-Americans of Yanagisako's study (1985), who define their families as Japanese or Japanese-American in contrast with their views of American families, my Chicana informants were less conscious of ethnicity. They did not compare their families to Anglo families. Rather their ideas about family reflected their place in the public world of work and the broader forces of the labor market's expansions and contractions. It was these institutions that affected their views of their families. Women with younger children placed family obligations first, before work. Women with older children used family ideology to justify their personal desires to continue working. These women valued highly their relationships with coworkers and the personal autonomy of leisure activities and socializing that did not interfere with family responsibilities. For the Chicana cannery workers, the perceptions of family and of work were intimately entwined. The meanings of work and family they constructed varied, but one could not be understood, or even discussed, separate from the other.