Bringing It Back Home: Perspectives on Gender and Family History in Modern Mexico

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Abstract

Lately, study of the family as a special set of historical questions has fallen out of fashion in modern Latin American history. Yet in increasing numbers, gender historians are examining courtship and sexual behavior, marital conflict, reproductive health, women's domestic labor, institutions that intersect with families, like education, medicine, and welfare, and political deployment of family-based ideologies. Has gender history replaced family history? This essay argues that it has not, but explores some of the ways that gender history has changed not only what we know about past families but also what we ask. Examining recent studies of the working classes in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Mexico, the era punctuated by the revolution of 1910–1917, this essay finds that scholarly assessments of the impact on the gender order of the economic and political restructuring that preceded and followed that upheaval have expanded the frame of how we think about families while at the same time affirmed the centrality of family in the dynamics of social and ideological change.

Introduction

Not long ago, study of the institution of the family was a flourishing sub-field of modern Latin American history.[1] Historians, like anthropologists, perceived that the family is a fundamental cultural, social, political and economic institution and a bridge connecting private life and the formation and intimate decisions of individuals with broad public events and trends. Historians bring to family studies their special interest in the ways that family structures and practices and the meanings that people have invested in their family relationships have changed over time.[2] Historians of the family in Latin America have sought to understand not only how the institution evolved throughout the region but also the multiple ways that families participated in and shaped their specific historical contexts.

The societies of Spanish Latin America share legacies of centuries of colonial rule but at the same time represent extraordinary diversity. Thus, historians of the family, like their colleagues in other sub-disciplines, have tried to understand how commonalities with other regions have played out in particular circumstances. The enduring role of the Catholic Church in

the Americas as the dominant cultural institution and its oversight of the life and family cycle of birth, marriage, and death drew attention to the family for historians interested a wide range of questions about society, culture and politics. Throughout the region, the mix of indigenous, European, and African peoples highlighted family studies as a window onto acculturation and resistance. Taking the family as a key site of socialization and differentiation, scholars analyzed kinship, broad demographic trends in marriage, household composition, fertility, mortality, and migration. Studies of canon and civil law illuminated changes in the regulation and practice of marriage, parental authority, and inheritance. Historians also examined the dynamics of families as economic institutions and analyzed the family as a locus of production for the laboring classes, and for the privileged, as the means to consolidate and transmit wealth and status. Recognizing families as political institutions, scholars explored the role of kin networks in organizing power and establishing influential economic and political lineages. During the nineteenth century, enduring family structures extending through patronage networks contrasted to chronically unstable states: for historians the "strong family, weak state" model reinforced the centrality of the institution of the family in historical studies of post–independence Spanish Latin America. One of the most important contributions that rigorous analysis of household formations has made to our understanding of the past is to correct assumptions that the industrial revolution brought about a collapse of the extended family and imposed a nuclear family model. For scholars of Latin America since independence, the persistence of peasant agriculture alongside industrial development that characterized the region positioned family history as a way to assess the influences of economic modernization on private life.[3]

Lately, however, family history has fallen out of fashion among historians of modern Latin America's Spanish-speaking societies.[4] At the same time, an increasing number of historians of the region is examining courtship and sexual behavior, marital conflict, reproductive health, women's domestic labor and participation in the paid workforce, institutions that intersect with families, such as education, medicine, and welfare, and the political deployment of family-based ideologies. Scholars engaged with these topics, however, are more likely to identify as practitioners of gender history than as historians of the family. Indeed, at present, continuity and change in factors shaping family life are being richly investigated and analyzed while, at the same time, "the family" as a special set of historical problems and questions is largely absent from the A-list of topics. To explore this seeming contradiction the present essay explores some of the ways that studies in gender history have changed not only what we know about the history of families but also what we ask. This discussion emphasizes recent gender studies of the Mexican working classes during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: for in focusing at the intersections of class and gender to examine the political and economic restructuring that preceded and followed

the Revolution of 1910–1917, scholars have expanded the frame of family history while affirming the centrality of family in the dynamics of social and ideological change.

Women's and Gender History: The Family in Eclipse

One reason why family history per se receded from the limelight is, ironically, the close association between women and family. Starting in the 1970s scholars inspired by the women's movement began a concerted effort to redress the biases that had marginalized women's roles and voices in the historical record and scholarly literature. In the introduction to her pioneering study, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790–1857*, Silvia Arrom noted that historians had tended to accept historical prescriptions on women's proper place: "In the rare instances when women are mentioned at all, they are usually portrayed as passive, powerless beings, absorbed in familial duties, confined to the home, and totally subordinated to men."[5] When Arrom set out to assess whether women's lives were indeed "as narrowly defined" and "as dominated by men" as depicted, she found instead that plebian and upper-class women asserted a strong presence in the social and commercial arenas of the capital city during the late colony and early republic. Women predominated among young urban migrants and headed a surprisingly high percentage of urban households. A significant number of women rejected marriage; and women who engaged in commerce or owned property used the law in distinctive ways.[6] In examining women's roles as mothers and wives, Arrom highlighted the diversity of women's choices and experiences and explored women's expectations of marriage by analyzing cases of ecclesiastical divorce. Similarly, other feminist scholars researching women's contributions to male-dominated arenas of politics and culture frequently examine maternal and domestic discourses, that is, rhetoric about ideals of feminine identities and behavior, but have tended to de-emphasize women's family and domestic roles in order to explore the multiplicity of women's experiences, including those that confound prescriptive concepts of femininity.

Important strands of family history established and analyzed demographic trends and points of change in marriage, reproduction, household composition, and inheritance.[7] The censuses, parish baptismal and marriage registers, and notary records documenting these topics fostered analytical methods that emphasized norms and statistically significant variations. These data established the foundation for analyzing long-term social change, *mestizaje*, class formation, and internal migration.[8] Demographic approaches in modern Latin American family history marked the sub-field's intersection with population studies and the demographic dimensions of theories of economic development, especially debates about over population.[9] As scholars of the region mounted interdisciplinary critiques of the assumptions underlying development models, historians of what was then called the

"new" social history became increasingly interested in social groups marginalized by mainstream economic policy and also frequently "marked" by differences of race, class, and gender. Sueann Caulfield, a historian of gender in modern Brazil, has noted that this shift has pushed demographic statistics to the footnotes.[10]

The focus on non-elite subjects required locating new sources and developing new methods. In contrast to elite families, whose literate members built and participated in political and economic institutions, the poor and socially marginalized usually left few personal records. In all social groups women frequently attained lower levels of literacy than men. To recover the voices and agency of those historical actors, scholars combed court records and the documents of regulatory agencies like orphanages and prisons. To discern the perspectives of historical subjects deemed dependent, criminal or deviant by the officials who created the documents, historians have increasingly turned to qualitative methods, such as discourse analysis.[11]

Drawing on these methods, gender scholarship has challenged concepts of the family as a unitary institution and shifted the frame defining the object of historical study.[12] Some family historians viewed families a collective "agents" acting in concert to make decisions about, for example, labor, consumption, and migration. Other scholars critiqued the concept of the family as a monolithic entity and questioned who participated in such decision-making and from what relative positions of power.[13] Just as feminist scholars have affirmed that "women" as a category requires unpacking by class, race, age, and marital status, they have also revealed the ways gender confers power and exacts subordination within families, thus emphasizing difference within the family unit. Like social historians who uncover the worlds and lives of the working poor, illiterate, and socially marginalized, gender historians have drawn on sources such as police and court records, which by their nature document deviance and disorder. As a result, much of their work has depicted the family as a site of gender conflict and struggle between couples and across generations.[14] Moreover, gender scholarship has revealed that the role of the heterosexual family in regulating and containing sexual behavior has been less than hegemonic.[15] These research trends challenge representations of families and households as undifferentiated objects of study and also suggest that the boundaries that supposedly distinguish one family from another or private from public social worlds may be more fluid than fixed.

Family and gender history converge and concur on questions about the pace and timing of social change. On the one hand, scholars who study families in specific historical contexts frequently assess mutual influence between family ideology and practice and significant political events like independence, or the ascendance of political ideologies like liberalism, with its emphasis on the individual and private property, or revolution.[16] This analytical approach is rooted in the concept of the family as the primary building block of society or a miniature state.[17] Like states, families organize

power, work, and the distribution of resources. Laws reify this view of family by defining marriage as the sole sanctioned means for family formation, by defining hierarchies within families as well as the specific roles of family members, their mutual obligations and benefits, and by establishing the consequences, such as loss of parental authority or disinheritance when individuals fail to meet those obligations. Not coincidentally, these legal definitions frequently incorporate prevailing notions of citizenship. But while new political regimes assert dominance by issuing laws regulating family or develop new ideologies or discourses about the family, historians of the family have found that actual practice – what people do and why – is more diverse and responds to different cultural rhythms. Similarly, scholars of women's and gender history have observed that standard chronological and political landmarks may not represent watersheds in the gender order.[18]

Throughout the historical discipline, the adoption of gender as an analytical lens has shown that prevailing concepts of public and private spheres, of production and reproduction, of fatherhood and motherhood, are discourses about masculine and feminine roles and identities. Such insights have led historians to understand that schools, markets, factories, mines, courts, and the halls of congress have been as important as private households as sites for negotiating the terms of gender and power, which in turn influence definitions of family relationships and family practice. Perhaps most importantly, the growing influence of gender history on the discipline as a whole has positioned concepts like patriarchy at the center of our field of inquiry.[19] In this light, the family loses its primacy as a gender engine producing masculine and feminine roles and identities, but, at the same time, extends the reach of family dynamics and relationships beyond home base. The family becomes one patriarchal institution among many, including the state and the work place. Like families, these institutions, along with education, welfare, and medicine, reproduce values and practices that reinforce – and can also challenge – established gender roles. In other words, recent gender scholarship on Latin America finds family everywhere, sometimes even at home, and reveals that presumed boundaries between private and public life, the classic dichotomy between "home and street," have historically been breached as often as formally observed.

In these diverse and salutary ways, gender history, building on the foundation of women's history, has given us fresh perspectives on past families. The following discussion explores ways that gender studies of the Mexican working classes during the thirty-year regime of Porfirio Díaz, 1876–1911, and the decades of social ferment and reform that followed Mexico's revolutionary conflict have enhanced our understandings of family as a site of ideological production and social change, and suggests as well ways that the perspectives particular to family history can contribute additional insights.

Work, Sex, and Family

Some of the most revealing work on change and continuity in Mexican family life comes from gender studies of labor and working-class formation, a body of work that has also provided an important balance to earlier studies that analyzed families of property and influence.[20] The economic transformations that gathered momentum during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century wrought significant changes across Mexico's social spectrum but particularly on the working classes. In the late nineteenth century, Mexico's growing waged labor force had roots in the countryside, where a renewed and intensive cycle of land concentration pushed rural men and women, single and married, into towns, cities, and centers of mining and manufacturing. Established urban artisans faced competition from mechanized production. Increasingly, laboring men and women forged identities based on their shared experiences of social class: the dramatic mining and textile strikes of the early 1900s, for example, were important landmarks in the construction of politicized working-class identities and aspirations.[21] New labor routines and the imposition of the capitalist work ethic meant that factory and mine workers were required to adapt to strict schedules, but modernizing production regimes also influenced after-hours entertainments and family life. William French has described how employers in the mining centers of northern Mexico favored married workers, whom they considered stable and responsible in contrast to the floating population of unattached seasonal male laborers. Managers provided married workers with housing, hospitals, and schools and in exchange for these demonstrations of labor paternalism they required higher standards of worker discipline and loyalty.[22]

Top-down efforts to create a disciplined workforce impinged directly on working-class families. Reflecting the diminishing influence of religion in Mexican social thought, modernizing reformers articulated secular concepts of civic piety and private virtue.[23] They strove to replace plebian vices of drink, prostitution, gambling, and violence with respectable bourgeois values of temperance and thrift and to convince workers to spend their leisure time in the private sphere of the family or to engage in healthy sport or public entertainments. Moral reformers assigned women the role of transforming the home into a sanctuary of virtue, economy, and cleanliness. To encourage women of all classes to devote themselves exclusively to these roles, educators argued that schooling should prepare them for motherhood and household management, while family magazines and manuals of manners and morals exalted maternity and domesticity. Women of the middle and upper classes followed the example of Mexico's First Lady and focused their philanthropy on poor mothers and children and instructed working-class women in approved homemaking and childcare methods.[24] While earning the family wage was the obligation of the male breadwinner, the working-class wife and mother was to reproduce and socialize the next generation of healthy, motivated workers. These dynamics illustrate the ways that gender discourses

constructed an apparent boundary between the masculine realm of production – work – and feminine realm of reproduction – family.[25]

Men's work discipline and sobriety and women's reproductive labor and domestic virtues defined respectability in gendered terms among both the middle and working classes and reinforced the rationales for a strict gender division of labor, which, in turn, defined sanctioned sexuality. Social convention erected such high barriers between feminine and masculine spheres of labor that boys and men who performed housework were considered sexually deviant.[26] So were women who ventured out of the home to earn a wage. As a growing number of women found employment in textile production and food processing, critics insisted that women belonged in the home and condemned the factory environment for corrupting women's morality. Social commentators warned that waged work led to prostitution and frequently conflated working women with prostitutes. Susie Porter has shown how women workers countered by drawing strategically on concepts of family and the gender rhetoric of morality when they framed petitions for better treatment and asserted their rights in the workplace.[27] At the same time, many commentators tolerated Mexico's legalized and licensed prostitution as a necessary evil to accommodate male sexual energy and preserve the honor of respectable women.[28] In contrast, the custom of *amasiato*, consensual but unmarried relationships among plebian women and men, marked not only their low social status but also their lack of respectability from the point of view of elite and middle-class observers. These patterns affirm the significance of family ideology and practice in class formation.

In a real sense, and reflecting strong continuities with earlier eras, the pact between working-class men and women forming new households was founded on the exchange of sex for labor. Although women who engaged in pre-marital sex risked losing their reputations – or honor – this did not deter many young working-class women who understood that consenting to sex cemented the promises of courtship.[29] In his study of elopement in early-twentieth-century Chihuahua, William French found that some young women arranged their own abductions in their eagerness to leave the paternal home and enter relationships premised on the exchange of their domestic labor for control over their suitors' *diario*, the household allocation of male wages. French argues that seduction and elopement represented a suitor's challenge to paternal authority over daughters and thus to the father's honor and masculinity.[30] In his study of urban crime, Pablo Piccato proposed that much family conflict and violence among Mexico City's popular classes turned on masculine control of wives' and daughters' labor power.[31] In these ways, studies linking work and sex, gender and power reveal intergenerational dynamics in the formation of new families.

What could the perspectives of family history add? While recent gender scholarship illuminates the interplay of economic and cultural factors tying work and gender ideologies to sexual divisions of labor and class identities,

the influence of these trends on childhood and fatherhood remains less explored. Indeed, the legacy of women's history in gender history has produced a bias toward construing the study of gender as the study of women. Likewise, studies in sexuality have tended to push children and the aged outside the frame of reference.

Tobias Hecht, an anthropologist specializing in childhood, wrote recently that, "Children are as scarce in contemporary writing about Latin America as women were three or four decades ago."[32] Barbara Potthast and Sandra Carreras have observed that in historical studies of modern Latin America, children appear largely as aggregated demographic groups, adjuncts of their mothers' roles, objects of educational or welfare reform, and delinquents to be redeemed.[33] Gender historians might point out that these categories are themselves gendered constructs, allocating children to the feminine realm of motherhood, or viewing problem children and adolescents through the lenses of sexuality and deviance. Although admittedly children leave few records of their own, scholars are nevertheless working to reconstruct, if not children's internal lives, at least the contexts and concepts that shaped their everyday experiences.

In Porfirian Mexico, liberal emphasis on the individual, the influence of positivism – the belief that society obeyed scientific laws, and the gendered discourses of moral reform constructing norms and expectations of motherhood and domesticity joined with the new medical specialties of obstetrics and pediatrics to reshape understandings of childhood.[34] The same magazines and manuals that promoted ideals of maternity also delineated the appropriate domestic environment for child rearing and offered advice on children's clothing, play, and behavior. Publications directed at a middle-class feminine readership also printed the latest medical recommendations for infant and early childhood care. These trends paralleled Anglo–American and European developments and marked the emergence in Mexico of the concept of childhood as a protected life stage whose nurture required specialized knowledge.[35]

In the late decades of the nineteenth century, however, the benefits of protected childhood, sometimes called sentimental childhood, were restricted largely to Mexico's upper social strata. Scholars of the family have argued that the concept of protected childhood, like that of adolescence, was tied to the institution of universal primary education and a reduced expectation of child labor.[36] In Porfirian Mexico, however, the ideal of protected childhood among the privileged classes contrasted markedly to the widely held expectation that children of the poor should work. Despite laws mandating universal, secular primary education, school attendance among urban working-class children was frequently short or sporadic, and industrial censuses counted child laborers in key sectors of Mexico City's economy.[37] As of 1907, children over seven years old could work in textile factories with parental permission.[38]

Despite the glorification of motherhood, research on urban public welfare institutions has shown that children of working-class single mothers were especially vulnerable to separation from their families: some entered public child welfare institutions and some entered other households as working dependents. By the turn of the century, the steep economic obstacles to maintaining family coherence encountered by recent urban migrants and established residents alike were reflected in rapidly rising admissions to the Mexico City's state-run foundling home. Most children who passed through public welfare establishments were destined for early employment on the lower rungs of the workforce. Like many of their mothers, girls frequently entered domestic service while still in their teens, or younger.[39]

Nevertheless, changing patterns of child circulation reveal the growing value placed on childhood and on children in Mexican society. Throughout the nineteenth century few children admitted to the Mexico City foundling home returned to their families. In contrast, at the turn of the century a higher percentage of parents, mothers in the majority, reclaimed their children than ever before. This dramatic development illustrates that the stigma attached to single motherhood had eroded. Such evidence of tenacious attachment even in the face of difficult economic circumstances also challenged elite critics who condemned poor mothers for their supposed lack of maternal feeling. Moreover, family reunifications thwarted the expectation among the urban middle and upper classes that abandoned babies and toddlers were available for adoption, a growing practice. Adoptions for family formation differed from prior patterns of informal adoption that frequently served to bring children into households of means as working but unpaid dependents. Although labor adoptions of older children continued, the late-nineteenth-century trend among the middle and upper classes to adopt babies and toddlers evolved independently of the law – formal adoption had been eliminated from Mexican liberal civil codes – and revealed new meanings attached to parent–child relationships. The greater number of children retrieved from the foundling home by their parents and the rising number of adoptions of infants and toddlers point to a high value placed on young children in family life and emotional fulfillment at both ends of the social spectrum.[40]

Did these changes in the social value and meaning of children in family life influence concepts of fatherhood, and if so, in what ways? Mexican law designated fathers the family authority, economic support, disciplinarian, and decision-maker; fathers were also legally obliged to provide class-appropriate education for their children. Mexico's nineteenth-century liberal civil codes withheld parental authority from mothers unless they were widowed and they lost it again on remarriage, although the hands-on work of childcare remained the mother's responsibility.[41] Nevertheless, glimpses of middle-class fathers' roles and attitudes in the intimate sphere of the family suggest that the emotional dimension of childrearing may not have been the exclusive domain of women. Neo-romantic poems on the topic of infant

and child death that filled family magazines poignantly depicted loving fathers' grief and suggest that middle-class fathers were involved in the emotional aspects of parenting described in the prescriptive literature on motherhood.[42] Did the late decades of the nineteenth century witness the emergence of bourgeois fatherhood as "sentimental patriarchy" in Mexico?

And what do we or can we know about the emotional dimensions of working-class fatherhood? French's and Piccato's studies, discussed above, reveal working-class fathers as controlling and sometimes violent patriarchs. The high proportion of women-headed households in Mexico City speaks to widespread paternal abandonment among the urban working classes. Certainly elite observers considered violence and promiscuity characteristic of plebian men and believed that their own ordered and harmonious homes defined their moral and class superiority.[43] (See above, however, on justifications for legal prostitution!) But French has also shown that skilled workers and their families adopted middle-class attitudes towards labor discipline, dress, and social behavior.[44] To discover whether the same may have been true for parenting, a combined gender and family history approach to investigating the emotional realms of fatherhood would render a rich harvest of insights into evolving spheres of family intimacy and constructions of masculinity. Indeed, a more complete portrait of late nineteenth-century class-based concepts of childhood and fatherhood would also support a clearer evaluation of the impact of Mexico's era of revolutionary reform on gender roles in family life.

Revolutionary Families

Although the "wind that swept Mexico" did not necessarily blow away old regime gender norms, there is no doubt that the Mexican Revolution accelerated the momentum of what historian Mary Kay Vaughan has called the modernization of patriarchy and "public appropriation of social reproduction."[45] Vaughan's formulation yokes gender and family studies and points as well to an expanded role of the Mexican state in family and private life. The decades following the revolution's military phase saw a rapid proliferation of public agencies and programs directed at Mexican families. A prolific gender scholarship examines the revolutionary state's involvement in maternal–child health, childcare, education, welfare, and state involvement with women's entry into the work force. Indeed, throughout Latin America, a new cycle of state formation prompted similar developments.

Like Mexico's mid-nineteenth-century liberals, the dominant revolutionary faction immediately issued laws redefining family relationships. Even before consolidating their victory, the Constitutionalists legalized definitive divorce and remarriage and followed up with a comprehensive Law of Family Relations in 1917, close on the heels of a constitution that expanded state commitments to universal public secular education, mandated maternity leaves, and restricted child labor. Innovations in the 1917 family law included

granting mothers and fathers equal authority over their children and legalizing adoption. While these advances, along with divorce, established the foundation for long-term shifts in family practice, reformers voiced more immediate fears that the vice of alcoholism and sexually transmitted disease threatened the health of the Mexican family and undermined national productivity and progress. To improve reproductive health and reduce infant and child mortality, public health officials established a network of clinics in some of Mexico City's poorest neighborhoods to provide pre- and postnatal medical care to working-class mothers and children. Newspapers competed for readership by sponsoring healthy baby contests and conferences on childhood issues and promoted the celebration of Mothers' Day in Mexico: these family-centered initiatives were soon taken up by state agencies. With public education a centerpiece of revolutionary reform, urban and rural schools became community centers hosting classes for adult women on childrearing and domestic hygiene. For working mothers, the Labor Code of 1931 mandated that factories open day-care centers.[46]

Indeed, motherhood and childhood moved front and center in politics and public policy. Children and youth became the ubiquitous symbols of the promising future of Mexico reborn, and in that process affirmed the politics of a paternal state and the unifying concept of the Revolutionary Family. The political importance assigned to motherhood transformed maternal identity into a vehicle for feminine empowerment. Included in politics and public life primarily as mothers, women across the political spectrum – radical feminists, conservative Catholics, labor activists, and even prostitutes – invoked their status as mothers to petition for expanded rights at home, in the work place, and in the public sphere.[47] Thanks to the richness of gender studies on these topics we know a great deal about what reformers, officials, and activists across the political spectrum said about families and the policies they advocated and implemented to modernize family relations from 1920 to 1940.

Although we know less about how mothers, fathers, and children behaved at home and what meanings they invested in their intimate relationships during this period of social ferment, the expanding role of public agencies in family life affords some insight into these questions. Whereas Porfirian reformers prescribed and moralized, policies of the revolutionary governments targeting family relations for modernization authorized public employees to cross thresholds and intervene directly in domestic affairs. Katherine Bliss has examined the ways that social workers of the Mexico City juvenile court, established in 1926, acted on modern concepts of paternity that emphasized a father's responsibility to maintain his health, protect his children, and provide a positive role model. Court officials frequently removed children and adolescents from the care of fathers they deemed abusive or morally corrupt and placed them in reformatories, where teachers and psychologists fulfilled the paternal responsibilities of discipline, protection, and education. Bliss has also shown that these concepts of

fatherhood had gained wide acceptance: when working-class residents of downtown Mexico City petitioned the government to remove prostitution from their neighborhoods, they invoked their paternal responsibilities to protect and provide moral guidance to their children, especially their daughters.[48] Ideas of fatherhood that emphasized responsibility over authority and discipline were not confined to the modernizing capital. Alexandra Puerto found that impoverished Maya workers on henequen plantations in the Yucatán asserted their identities as fathers and citizens when they petitioned officials for medical interventions to improve their children's health and survival.[49] Puerto's findings indicate the need for a closer integration of indigenous with working-class family history. Indeed, given evidence that Mexicans across the social spectrum shared understandings of "modern" fatherhood, gender and family historians should look for the roots of those concepts prior to the revolution.

Official interventions reached beyond poor and problem families: respectable working- and middle-class families also underwent state scrutiny. The review process of legal adoption, for example, exposed the living arrangements and personal motivations of would-be adopters. Applicants submitted to home visits from social workers, who asked a barrage of intimate questions to determine whether prospective parents held correct views of motherhood and childhood and conformed to the gender ideal of a male breadwinner and stay-at-home mother. In turn, adoption applicants, especially women, spoke eloquently about their longing for a child and the emptiness of a home without children. Single and divorced women also sought to adopt and cited as their motives both emotional fulfillment and their desire to participate fully in society as mothers, the role assigned such importance in public life.[50] Legal adoption, the creation of a juvenile justice system, expanding health services, and above all, the centrality of education in the Mexican state's modernizing project, represent the proliferation of public institutions intersecting with family life in the post–revolutionary period.

Similarly, a brief look at adolescence from the combined perspectives of family and gender history affirms the increasing interaction between families and state agencies and suggests avenues for the further exploration of family and gender dynamics during Mexico's reform era and beyond. At the end of the nineteenth century in European and Anglo-American societies, physicians and educators recognized the years between the onset of puberty and full maturity as a distinct stage of physical, psychological, and social development. Twentieth-century Mexican specialists sought to extend schooling and adult moral guidance beyond childhood to insure that youth emerged better educated and trained to engage in modern commerce and production and that they possessed the emotional judgment and reproductive health to assume the responsibilities of citizenship and parenthood. Mexican middle-class adolescents of the era met parental and governmental expectations by prolonging their education and socializing in approved

supervised venues. Newspaper society pages and Sunday pictorial supplements reported their busy round of family parties, music recitals, and charity costume pageants as well as patriotic ceremonies and sports exhibitions held at school. The importance of public education in the revolutionary modernizing project, coupled with the growth of the Mexican middle class, whose children attended school more consistently and for a longer period, transformed the school into an institution that rivaled the family for youth socialization into approved gender roles. Indeed, critics accused the state of usurping parental authority in this regard, especially on the question of closure of Church schools and controversial subjects like sex education.[51]

New research reveals that urban working-class adolescents between the ages of twelve and eighteen marked that transitional stage of life by asserting increased independence from parental vigilance and discipline. Working parents frequently removed their children from school to help with household support. Parents assigned adolescent girls the oversight of younger siblings and often the bulk of the housework, too, or placed their daughters in domestic service. Teenage boys who had left school were expected to work and contribute their wages to the family in exchange for continued support. Rebelling against these expectations, many urban adolescents sought out the latest fashions and socialized with their peers on the streets and in the cinemas and dance halls of the modernizing metropolis. Indeed, in contrast to their parents' generation, post-revolutionary youth increasingly formed their ideas of masculine and feminine behavior outside the home. Adolescent working-class *capitalinos* of the 1920s and 1930s may have experimented with independence and sexual relationships, but they were less eager to assume adult responsibilities of steady work and committed family life. Frequently, however, the outcomes of casual romantic liaisons reflected persistent gender inequality: young men enjoyed the advantages of social mores and laws founded on a double standard that condemned sexually adventurous women but accepted male promiscuity. Officials of the Mexico City juvenile court intervened in underage courtship in much the same manner as their colonial and nineteenth-century predecessors, at times overruling parents in supporting a young couple's wishes to marry and at times assisting parents in mediating the resolution of contested relationships between young men and women.[52] These findings reveal that the concept of adolescence may have changed understandings and identities based on life stages, but that the power differentials of the gender order remained firmly in place.

Unquestionably, through institutions like the juvenile court, legal adoption, education and medicine, the state asserted with renewed authority and extended reach the public interest and involvement in the formation of families. Indeed, by the early 1940s, welfare officials made it a policy priority that common law couples marry and legally recognize their children.[53] Such interventions largely affirmed and perpetuated established gender norms, suggesting that the growing state role in family life, the so-called

"welfare state," institutionalized and perpetuated conservative gender relations and related family practice, with public agencies assuming a paternal role.

Home Again

Gender scholarship on late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Mexico has demonstrated the increasing permeability of the boundaries between family and public life and affirmed the importance of examining public–private interactions in tracing the history of family relations. Additionally, gender studies have articulated the different experiences of family members, identified women's roles beyond the family, shown that gender norms, like family practice, have their own pace of change, and, at the same time, have expanded and enriched our concept of family and the approaches we use to document and analyze family relationships, practices, and meanings. Or, in the terms of post-modernism, gender history has de-centered the family. Even so, there are good reasons to bring the questions and frameworks particular to family history back into the disciplinary mix. Motherhood, fatherhood, childhood, and adolescence are, after all, identities and experiences formed in relation with other family members. Renewed attention to the ways that people have acted on their understandings of themselves as members of families over the life course can refresh historical examination of social experiences like childhood and old age, which have not been central to the analytical paradigms of gender studies. Historians have yet to assess, for example, the impact of Mexico's social security system, initiated in 1943, on gendered concepts of dependency affecting the aged. Moreover, the perspectives of family history remind us to differentiate between patriarchy as a concept and fatherhood in actual practice. Just as historians followed women outside the home to reveal the diversity of women's experience, scholars should follow men back into the home to examine the dynamic interplay between fatherhood and masculinity.[54] At the same time, incorporating gender analysis into family history is now imperative and will continue to be so as historians investigate the intimate dimensions of the dominant trends of Mexico's more recent past, such as urbanization, transnational migration, the falling birthrate, decline in infant mortality and extension of life expectancy, and the resurgence of indigenous identity politics.

Short Biography

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Notes

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[1] This article focuses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mexico with additional references to studies on Spanish Latin America. The rich harvest of recent studies in Brazilian family history deserves separate discussion.

[2] See T. Hareven, "What Difference Does It Make?" *Social Science History*, 20/3 (1996): 317–344.

[3] See D. Balmori, S. Voss, and M. Wortmann, *Notable Family Networks in Latin America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984); D. Brading and C. Wu, "Population Growth and Crisis: León, 1720–1860," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 5/1 (1973): 1–36; C. Harris, *A Mexican Family Empire: The Latifundio of the Sánchez Navarros, 1765–1867* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1975); E. Kuznesof and R. Oppenheimer (eds.), *Special Issue: The Latin American Family in the Nineteenth Century. Journal of Family History*, 10/3 (1985); E. A. Kuznesof, "The History of the Family in Latin America: A Critique of Recent Work," *Latin American Research Review*, 24/2 (1989): 168–86; S. Lipsett-Rivera (ed.), *Special Issue: Children in the History of Latin America. Journal of Family History*, 23/3 (1998); V. Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); R. McCaa, "The Peopling of Nineteenth-Century Mexico: Critical Scrutiny of a Censured Century," in J. Wilkie, C. A. Contreras, and C. A. Weber (eds.), *Statistical Abstract of Latin America* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Los Angeles, Latin American Center, 1993), 602–33; R. T. Smith (ed.), *Kinship Ideology and Practice in Latin America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); M. Szuchman, *Order, Family, and Community in Buenos Aires, 1810–1860* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988); D. Walker, *Kinship, Business, and Politics: The Martínez del Rio Family in Mexico* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986).

[4] On the other hand, scholarship on the family in the colonial period continues to flourish. A partial list includes R. Boyer, *Lives of the Bigamists: Marriage, Family, and Community in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); P. Gonzalbo Aizpuru (ed.), *Familias Novohispanas, Siglos XVI al XIX* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1991); A. Lavrin (ed.), *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); P. Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574–1821* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988); A. Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

[5] S. M. Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790–1857* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), 1.

[6] Ibid., 3–4.

[7] Focusing on Mexico, see E. Couturier, "Women and the Family in Eighteenth-Century Mexico: Law and Practice," *Journal of Family History*, 10 (Fall 1985): 294–304; Gonzalbo Aizpuru (ed.), *Familias novohispanas*; P. Gonzalbo Aizpuru and C. Rabell (eds.), *La familia en el mundo iberoamericano* (Mexico City: UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, 1994); J. J. Pescador, *De bautizos a fieles difuntos: Familia y mentalidades en una parroquia urbana: Santa Catarina de México, 1568–1820* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1992).

[8] See McCaa, "The Peopling of Nineteenth-Century Mexico: Critical Scrutiny of a Censured Century."

[9] For a recent work using these concepts, see G. Therborn, *Between Sex and Power: Family in the World, 1900–2000* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[10] S. Caulfield, "The History of Gender in the Historiography of Latin America," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 81/3–4 (2001): 451–90.

[11] See K. E. Bliss and W. E. French, "Introduction: Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America since Independence," in K. E. Bliss and W. E. French (eds.), *Gender, Sexuality and Power in Latin America since Independence* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, forthcoming, 2006).

[12] See, E. Jelin (ed.), *Family, Household and Gender Relations in Latin America* (London: Kegan Paul International and UNESCO, 1991).

[13] See Hareven, "What Difference Does It Make?" 326.

[14] See for example, S. J. Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men, and Power in Late Colonial Mexico* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); C. Hunefeldt, *Liberalism in the Bedroom: Quarreling Spouses in Nineteenth-Century Lima* (College Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); S. González Montes and P. Iracheta Cenegrota, "La violencia en la vida de las mujeres campesinas: El distrito de Tenango, 1880–1910," in C. Ramos Escandón (ed.), *Presencia y transparencia: La mujer en la historia de México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1987), 111–41.

[15] K. E. Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); R. M. Irwin, E. J. McCaughan, and M. Rocío Nasser (eds.), *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

[16] See, S. M. Arrom, "Changes in Mexican Family Law in the Nineteenth Century: The Civil Codes of 1870 and 1884," *Journal of Family History*, 10/3 (1985): 305–17.

[17] For a gender critique of this model, see R. Connell, "Men, Gender and the State," in S. Ervø and T. Johansson (eds.), *Among Men: Moulding Masculinities*, vol. 1 (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2003), 15–63.

[18] See, for example, S. Chambers, *From Subjects to Citizens: Honor, Gender, and Politics in Arequipa, Peru, 1780–1854* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

[19] See, for example, E. Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999). Zolov places patriarchy at the center of his study and examines the multiple ways that the Mexican youth counterculture challenged patriarchal authority in the family and the state.

[20] For comparison, see L. Tabili, "Dislodging the Center/Complicating the Dialectic: What Gender and Race Have Done for the Study of Labor," *International Labor and Working Class History*, 63 (2003): 14–20. See also L. A. Lomnitz and M. Pérez-Lizaur, *A Mexican Elite Family, 1820–1980* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).

[21] J. Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

[22] W. E. French, *A Peaceful and Working People: Manners, Morals, and Class Formation in Northern Mexico* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

[23] A. S. Blum, "Conspicuous Benevolence: Liberalism, Public Welfare, and Private Charity in Porfirian Mexico City, 1877–1910," *The Americas*, 58/4 (2001): 7–38.

[24] See R. Barceló, "Hegemonía y conflicto en la ideología porfiriana sobre el papel de la mujer y la familia," in S. González Montes and J. Tuñón (eds.), *Familias y mujeres en México: Del modelo a la diversidad* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1997), 73–109; C. Ramos Escandón, "Señoritas porfirianas: mujer e ideología en el México progresista," in C. Ramos Escandón (ed.), *Presencia y transparencia: La mujer en la historia de México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1987), 143–61.

[25] French, *A Peaceful and Working People*. For comparison with other areas of Latin America, see, for example: A. Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia's Industrial Experiment, 1905–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); E. Q. Hutchison, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900–1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); T. M. Klubock, *Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile's El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904–1951* (Durham, NC: Duke University

Press, 1998); L. Putnam, *The Company They Keep: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870−1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[26] See, Irwin, McCaughan, and Rocío Nasser (ed.), *The Famous 41*. On long-term change in men's participation in housework and childcare, see M. G. Gutmann, *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

[27] S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879−1931* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2003).

[28] Bliss, *Compromised Positions*.

[29] See W. E. French, " 'Te Amo Muncho': The Love Letters of Pedro and Enriqueta," in J. M. Pilcher (ed.), *The Human Tradition in Mexico* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003), 123–35. See also, Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico*.

[30] Similarly, Victoria Chenaut found that an indigenous Totonac mother in the rural district of Papantla, Veracruz, also construed honor as an intergenerational matter when she sued both her daughter's seducer and his father for damages: V. Chenaut, "Honor y ley: La mujer totonaca en el conflicto judicial en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX," in S. González Montes and J. Tuñón (eds.), *Familias y mujeres en México: Del modelo a la diversidad* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1997), 111–60.

[31] P. Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900−1931* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 127−28.

[32] T. Hecht, "Children and Contemporary Latin America," in T. Hecht (ed.), *Minor Omissions: Children in Latin American History and Society* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 232–50.

[33] B. Potthast and S. Carrera, "Introducción. Niños y jóvenes entre la familia, la sociedad y el Estado," in B. Potthast and S. Carrera (eds.), *Entre la familia, la sociedad y el Estado. Niños y jóvenes en América Latina (siglos XIX–XX)* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2005), 7–24.

[34] See A. del Castillo, "Moral médica y secularización: El cuerpo infantil en el discurso medico del porfiriato," *Política y Cultura*, 16 (Fall 2001): 143−69.

[35] Potthast and Carrera, "Introducción," 10−11.

[36] F. F. Furstenberg, "The Sociology of Adolescence and Youth in the 1990s: A Critical Commentary," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62/4 (2000): 896−910.

[37] H. Díaz Zermeño, "La escuela nacional primaria en la ciudad de México," *Historia mexicana*, 29 (1979): 59−90; Porter, *Working Women*, 11−13.

[38] "Laudo del 4 de enero de 1907 dictado por Porfirio Díaz," in E. de la Torre Villar, M. González Navarro, and S. Ross (eds.), *Historia Documental De México*, 2 vols. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1964), vol. 2, 603.

[39] A. S. Blum, "Public Welfare and Child Circulation, Mexico City, 1877−1925," *Journal of Family History*, 23/3 (1998): 240−71. See also, N. Milanich, "The Casa de Huerfanos and Child Circulation in Late-Nineteenth-Century Chile," *Journal of Social History*, 38/2 (2004): 311−40.

[40] Blum, "Public Welfare and Child Circulation."

[41] See C. Ramos Escandón, "Entre la ley y el cariño. Normatividad jurídica y disputas familiares sobre la patria potestad en México (187−1896)," in *Entre la familia, la sociedad y el Estado*, 115−41. See also, D. J. Guy, "Parents before the Tribunals: The Legal Construction of Patriarchy in Argentina," in E. Dore and M. Molyneux (eds.), *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 172−93.

[42] Women's and family magazine such as *El Album de la Mujer* and *La Familia* carried moralizing essays on motherhood and domesticity, some by Mexican authors and some excerpted from Spanish or other Latin American publications.

[43] See, for example, Francisco A. Lerdo, "Morirme no Quiero," *La Familia*, 16 December 1883, p. 5; José M. Bandera, "En la Muerte de Mi Hija," *El Album de la Mujer*, 24 May 1885, p. 204.

[44] W. E. French, "*Progreso Forzado*: Workers and the Inculcation of the Capitalist Work Ethic in the Parral Mining District," in W. H. Beezley, C. E. Martin and W. E. French (eds.), *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1994), 191−212.

[45] M. K. Vaughan, "Modernizing Patriarchy: State Policies, Rural Households, and Women in Mexico, 1930−1940," in *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America*, 194−214.

[46] M. Acevedo, *El 10 de Mayo* (Mexico City, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1982); A. S. Blum, "Breaking and Making Families: Adoption and Public Welfare, Mexico City, 1917−1940," in

G. Cano, J. Olcott, and M. K. Vaughan (eds.), *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming); S. A. Buck, "El control de la natalidad y el Día de la Madre: Política feminista y reaccionaria en México, 1922–1923," *Signos históricos* (Mexico City), 5 (2000): 9–53; G. Cano, J. Olcott, and M. K. Vaughan (eds.), *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming); E. Muñiz, *Cuerpo, representación y poder: México en los albores de la reconstrucción nacional, 1920–1934* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2002); J. Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); S. Porter, *Working Women*; P. A. Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2003); Vaughan, "Modernizing Patriarchy."

[47] Bliss, *Compromised Positions*; J. Olcott, "Worthy Wives and Mothers: State-Sponsored Organizing in Postrevolutionary Mexico," *Journal of Women's History*, 13/4 (Winter 2002): 106–31; S. Porter, *Working Women*; Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*.

[48] K. E. Bliss, "Paternity Tests: Fatherhood on Trial in Mexico's Revolution of the Family," *Journal of Family History*, 24/3 (July 1999): 330–50.

[49] A. Puerto, "Henequen Monoculture, Maya Labor, and Infant Mortality in Postrevolutionary Yucatán," in T. Marko and A. Warren (eds.), *Women, Ethnicity, and Medical Authority: Historical Perspectives on Reproductive Health in Latin America*, CILAS Working Paper 21 (San Diego, CA: Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies, University of California, San Diego, 2004), 27–48.

[50] Blum, "Breaking and Making Families."

[51] See, for example, *El Universal* and *Excélsior*, both leading newspapers of Mexico City. See also, Schell, *Church and State Education*.

[52] K. E. Bliss and A. S. Blum, "Dangerous Driving: Adolescence, Sex, and the Gendered Experience of Public Space in Early Twentieth-Century Mexico City," in K. E. Bliss and W. E. French (eds.), *Gender, Sexuality and Power in Modern Latin America* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, forthcoming), 163–86.

[53] Secretaría de Asistencia Pública, *Informe de labores presentado al H. Ejecutivo de la Unión, por el Dr. Gustavo Baz, Secretario del Ramo* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Asistencia Pública, 1942).

[54] See, for example, M. C. Gutmann, *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

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