

# **Dominican Women across Three Generations: Educational Dreams, Goals and Hopes**

Rosie M. Soy &  
Stefan Bosworth



**DOMINICAN  
STUDIES INSTITUTE**

*Research Monograph*



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## **CUNY Dominican Studies Institute Dominican Research Monograph Series**

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*Dominican Research Monograph Series*, a series of publications of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, seeks to disseminate knowledge on the Dominican experience in the United States, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere. Generally, the texts published in the series will have been generated by research projects sponsored by the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute.

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Pablo Rodríguez

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The CUNY Dominican Studies Institute at City College is an organized research unit of the City University of New York approved by the Board of Trustees of the University February 22, 1994. The Institute's primary mission is the production and dissemination of knowledge on the Dominican experience. City College, Hostos Community College, and the central administration of CUNY, with the support of the Dominican Community in New York, have led the effort that created the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute.

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## Foreword

The CUNY Dominican Studies Institute is pleased to present the work of Professors Rosie M. Soy and Stefan Bosworth, *Dominican Women across Three Generations: Educational Dreams, Goals, and Hopes* under the Dominican Research Monograph Series. Through a set of interviews with female members of three generations of Dominican immigrant families in New York City, combined with a broad panoramic view of the sub-field of Dominican immigration studies distilled from little-known doctoral dissertations and master theses, the authors explore the struggle of Dominican women to access formal education, including higher education, and the impact of such access in their lives and on their own perceptions of their experiences. The study provides insight as well on how the social contexts in which these immigrant *dominicanas* have lived (in the country of origin first, in the diaspora later) hampered or eased educational opportunities at different moments of their families' histories. By highlighting important issues in the collective migration experience of Dominicans through the study of individual cases, and by pointing at the many questions still to be researched on the topic, Professors Soy and Bosworth have provided us with another tool for understanding one of the most important phenomena of Dominican contemporary history.

Abrazos,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Hernández', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Ramona Hernández  
Director, CUNY Dominican Studies Institute  
Professor of Sociology, The City College of New York

Professor Rosie Soy is an Associate Professor in Humanities and Social Sciences at Hudson County Community College in New Jersey. She was born in the Philippines and grew up in California. She received a B.A. in History with a minor in Spanish from San Francisco State University and an M.A. in English/American literature from the University of California, San Diego. Her major research interest is in the field of immigration, specifically focusing on the effects of immigration on people coming to the United States from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. She has co-presented numerous research papers on the effects of immigration on Dominican and Puerto Rican women over three generations. Professor Soy expects to further deepen her study of these issues in future research.

Dr. Stefan Bosworth is currently an acting Assistant Professor in the Behavioral Science Department at Hostos Community College, CUNY. He earned his B.A. and M.A. in Political Science from Sonoma State University, California and his Ph.D. in Sociology from the Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY). He has done extensive research in the field of immigration, particularly on its effects on Dominican and Puerto Rican immigrants over the last 14 years. He has co-presented several research papers on the effects of immigration on Dominican and Puerto Rican women over three generations. He intends for his research in this area to continue to be an ongoing focus of his work.

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This paper is dedicated to Sarah Aponte, Head Librarian of the CUNY Dominican Studies Library at The City College of New York, whose invaluable assistance helped make this paper possible.



## **Introduction**

This paper discusses the struggles that female students in the CUNY campuses and their families from the Dominican Republic have faced in trying to succeed in the United States. The narrative comments from each generation of respondents reflect incredible struggles and hardships, but also of these women's great strengths and endurance. Through three generations, these women succeeded in their attempts to begin a new life in an unfamiliar country with an unfamiliar culture and language. For the purposes of this study, the term "first generation" refers to Dominican women born and raised in the Dominican Republic. The words "second generation" is used in reference to Dominican women who were born in the Dominican Republic and came to the U.S. as children or teenagers. The "third generation" are U.S. native-born children of the second generation. Their attempts, articulated through their own voices, reveal the changes and adaptations occurring among the three generations of these families as they faced "a brave new world." Incorporated in this paper are narrative comments made by respondents from the interviews in this study.

The effects immigration and adjustment to a new environment have had, and continue to have, on the families of our students and by implication, the students themselves, will be our primary foci. We will explore these factors — both assets and limitations of these families — that have affected them during three generations. Most importantly, we should recognize the tremendous courage that imbued the women of these families to persevere and succeed as they moved from the countryside to the urban city areas first in the Dominican Republic and then later to the United States.

A last consideration is the understanding that our respondents, especially the third generation of women who are in college, are not necessarily typical of the female Dominican population in general. While many women in this group of immigrants do go to college, many more are often unable to do so because of personal or familial situations and because society many times does not encourage or support minority groups at obtaining an adequate education that might lead to better economic opportunities. We recognize that

these students and the family members who preceded them reflect those immigrants who have succeeded despite many obstacles such as limited education, insufficient housing, an absence of essential financial resources, and discrimination due to their determination. Though our respondents appear to have found individual solutions to these problems, our society would have to have major economic and structural change before the Dominican immigrant communities could advance to the educational and economic standards of white Americans.

Our Dominican female students are making it although, as said earlier, they are not typical. We also argue that these are the women who dared to dream and to some extent, had their dreams partially fulfilled. We must add one other discouraging note. As the number of factory jobs decrease and are replaced by low paying service jobs, as funding declines for public education - primary, secondary and higher - and money for welfare and housing decline, even the doors that these students and their families walked through earlier may soon disappear. We are proud of our students' successes that are achieved even within a societal framework that often seems structured to generate failure for many immigrants. We hope that by using the family narratives of our students and of their families, we can begin to tell their stories.

## **Women of the First Generation: Their Lives and Their Educational Dreams**

“In my grandmother’s generation, education was not as important as marriage and having a family.”

“She (grandmother) knows how to read, write and mathematics. Women do not need more than that. What for? To use it to wash the clothes?”

For our first generation respondents, life in the Dominican Republic in the 1930’s, 1940’s 1950’s and 1960’s was often a difficult series of struggles to keep one’s family alive and well. The economic necessity of hard work frequently consumed most of the lives of men and women as well as children. Many first generation respondents were peasants from the countryside where women were continuously involved with the family’s daily struggle to live and stay together. Men were expected to support their families but women also were seen as providers, besides being expected to be managers in the household economy. If a family owned a small farm, a *finca*, it was not unusual for women and children to assist with farm chores such as caring for and feeding the animals and harvesting the crops. Female children grew up having completed little or no formal education because they were needed to help with the work in the family. In the rural communities women were confined to the home and family owned properties since they could exist through the work on their land and living off of what they produced (Weyland, 1998).

The patriarchal ideology of the culture did not encourage women to work outside the home but find work that relatively limited them to the home environment and maintained their family obligations. In Dominican culture the mother and other female relatives had traditionally been responsible for child-rearing and taking care of *la casa*, the home. This norm was one major reason that female members of the household in previous generations rarely completed more than an elementary school education. Work such as sewing, cooking, working on other people’s farm near the house or

taking care of other people's children were common and acceptable choices available for women as well as cloth manufacturing, cigar and basket making and various other types of craft work (Weyland, 1998). Wives and children also performed many of the strenuous chores on the farm. Just as women pitched in with these chores, they were still expected to cook, do the laundry and raise the children. The wife's responsibility in maintaining an orderly house and well-run home was considered primary whether she did or did not have to work to bring in extra money. The expectation that women would continue to run the household even if they worked was not only common among our respondents, but reflective of the culture. According to Weyland, "even today the socialization of women in the Dominican Republic centers on... child caring, feeding the family, keeping the household together and contributing to the household economy by participating in productive activities realized within the home sphere, or, if outside the home, activities of a similar domestic nature" (1998, p.29). One first generation respondent described this expectation of a relative:

"My aunt never worked outside the home. In her generation wives kept the house and raised the children. Cooking was done on a wood burning stove. She had to remove ashes from old fires throughout the day as well as put new supplies of coal or wood in the stove. In those times women had to spend a few hours everyday sifting ashes and lighting fires. Also, water had to be carried on the head from the river to the house. In addition to all this, coffee required much physical labor because the coffee had to be roasted and grinded... my aunt had to wash the clothes by hand all chores were difficult..."

Women supplemented the family income with their meager earnings from additional jobs. Although the earnings might have been small due to the menial jobs the women found, the money was still welcomed since they increased the family's chances of survival as seen in our respondents' statements:

“My grandmother said that when she was young in the town she lived in, Jánico in the Dominican Republic, there were many job opportunities either as farmers or baby-sitters or fruit and vegetable sellers. The money she made wasn't enough to help her parents to buy the necessary things for her home.”

“My grandmother... at the age of sixteen began working as a machine operator for twelve years. ‘I only earned a couple of cents a week. With the money I earned, I purchased plantains, rice, meat... I remember the first time I went to get the job how scared I was because this being my first job, I did not know what to expect. When I entered, I asked if there were any positions available and was hired instantly; getting a job was not difficult. The workers, mostly women, worked under unsafe conditions and were obligated to do the work. I did what I had to do and I had to help my family... it was something different and it felt good to know that I was helping out in the family...”

Since women were expected to stay in the home, society assumed that they would need little formal education, particularly in the case of poor women. The U.S. occupational government on the island during the 1920's restructured Dominican education with an emphasis on scholarships and building schools where the curricula reinforced for boys “the dominant ideology for instruction in agricultural and other industries” (Weyland, 1998, p.48). Simultaneously, vocational schools were created to teach women the customary traditional female activities such as cooking, ironing, cleaning and especially sewing. After 1921 when the Dominican economy entered into a deep crisis, the formal education of women became secondary as a new law stipulated that some of the women's vocational schools should be closed limiting opportunities for women in the needle industry and reducing the need for professional women who taught in these and other schools (Weyland, 1998).

Clearly, the insistence in maintaining that women continue learning their social roles and responsibilities was the norm in the society at the time. Thus, the culture was, and to a varying extent still

is, strongly patriarchal with an emphasis on women taking care of the home and men providing the economic support for the family. Among our respondents, however, the level of education over three generations of families from the Dominican Republic had increased significantly. Not only was this true for our respondents but for women from the culture in general, particularly those who had immigrated to the United States. In Hernández & Rivera-Batiz's study (2000) the overall educational attainment of Dominicans in the United States was the lowest in this country. In the year 2000, 49 percent of Dominicans 25 years of age or older had not completed high school and only 10.6 had completed college. The situation for U.S.-born Dominicans was sharply different and reflected the experience of Dominican New Yorkers. For U.S.-born Dominicans in New York, the proportion who attained some college education rose from 31.7 percent in 1980 to 42.8 percent in 1990 and to 55.1 percent in 2000 (pp.7-8). A first generation respondent stated to her interviewer:

“As she (grandmother) continued [the interview], I could see the self-pity in her eyes and hear it in her voice. ‘*Mi pobre madre* (My poor mother). I can remember her sending us to school so we could learn how to read and write, so we could defend ourselves out in the world. That’s all that was really needed to know. My being a girl I was also taught how to sew. My older brothers would go to school in the morning and work in other people’s farms so they could earn money for the necessities of the family.”

A second reason that females among our first generation respondents received little education was that most of our respondents came from poor families with few resources to send anyone to school. A third factor was that many rural areas in the Dominican Republic often did not have schools that were accessible three generations ago. Even at a young age, female members of the household were expected to help with household chores including helping to raise younger brothers and sisters in what were usually very large families. These traditions have begun to change both here in the United States among Dominicans and in the Dominican



Republic, through the process of urbanization, migration and integration into the new society (Pessar, 1990). The commentaries below on two respondents in the first generation reflected the negative attitude on education especially for the poor:

“My grandmother does not know how to read or write. In her days, it was difficult for women to go to school, especially when they lived in the countryside. Education was compulsory but in those rural places, some parents did not envision the importance of going to school.”

“My grandmother... went up to third grade. Her parents did not care if she didn't attend school. 'I learned very little how to write'... Her family was very poor... She had to hold many jobs because she could not read or write.”

Throughout much of the world three generations ago education was not readily available to the poor and what limited resources were available were often allocated to male children. In contrast, there was greater availability of educational opportunity for women in the United States three generations ago although here these possibilities for women's education had greatly expanded. In a student's interview of her grandmother, she learned that “in the Dominican Republic in my grandmother's generation, the highest level of education that most Dominicans received was a 6th grade education.” Grandmothers often expressed their wish to have been more educated but explained their lack of education was due to economic reasons or the dominance of male authority at that time that educating female children was not a priority for many families from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

“My grandmother didn't have a happy childhood. She never had the opportunity to attend any type of school, and therefore she grew up illiterate. I was told the reason she was not sent to school was that in those days children were not sent to school.”

“Education was important to both her (grandmother’s) parents but because of financial problems, they (grandmother and siblings) were not allowed to finish their studies. In 1928 my grandmother ended her education at sixteen and began working as a machine operator for twelve years... ‘I did what I had to do because that was the only thing there was for women to do and I had to help my family... The sad part is not being able to further my education.’”

Among some of our first generation female respondents in regards to the generally low levels of education, these women might have reflected a combination of individual strengths, exceptional ability and good luck.

“My grandmother attended school in the Dominican Republic. She was and still is a very smart lady (62 years old now) with only a sixth grade education. This was more than both her parents had. She would have had more years of schooling, but she was getting married. She says that the expectations of boys and girls were the same when it came to schooling. It was just as important for them to be educated... My grandmother says that if she would have been given a chance for a better education, she would have jumped at the chance. She feels that an education is something that is very important for one to have... if she had a chance to do it all over again, she would have gone to college and taken up a career in public relations.”

“After graduating from high school (in the Dominican Republic), my grandmother went off to college without her mother’s consent. She had worked on getting good grades so she could get a scholarship to college, and she got it. Back then scholarships were not as they are now. There would be a ballot with ten honor students and only one of these ten got the scholarship. After the ballot was cast, the richest person in town would pay for all cost (their choice of course). My grandmother was the lucky one.”

Ultimately, despite the entire family working, there was not enough income to support the family and keep it out of poverty.

Members of the family, both male and female, moved to Santo Domingo, Santiago or other cities in the Dominican Republic to find work so they could send money back to the rest of the family. More commonly, their children decided to immigrate to the United States to earn more money and provide better opportunities for their children (Duany, 1994). They often came with the idea of working for a while, earning enough money and returning home (Duany, 1994; Hernández & Torres-Saillant, 1996).

## Patterns of Immigration Among Dominicans

“My mother kept the dream to become someone in life so she gave herself a second opportunity to get more education. In 1989 when my mother was fifty-five years old and all her children had grown up, she moved to the United States where she found her second chance.”

Dominican families and the families of our respondents usually immigrated to the United States for two major reasons: primarily, for the economic opportunities that working on the mainland afforded both supposed and real (Pessar, 1990; Hernández & Rivera-Batiz 2003; Duany, 1994) and secondly, for the educational opportunities available for their children. In a broader sense most Dominicans moved to New York in search of a better life, “buscando mejor vida” (Duany, 1994, p.28). Similar to the earlier immigrants at the turn of the 20th century who came from other parts of the world, the arrival of Dominicans to the United States was for them a dream come true. A better life for themselves and their families was considered possible even though for many the dreams hoped for did not later materialize. Our respondents reflected these aspirations and dreams despite their anxieties and fears over the hardships they would face in immigrating.

It was estimated that in 1992, approximately 40,000 undocumented Dominicans resided in the United States (Torres-Saillant & Hernández, 1998). While most Dominicans came legally (Duany, 1994), many Dominicans, who came illegally, took great risks in coming. Some came on tourist visas and when the visas expired, they just stayed. Others came in small boats, or yolas, “small rudimentary sailboat(s) made of wood” (Hernández, 2002, p.32), which they sailed from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico and then these immigrants either stayed in Puerto Rico or came to the mainland pretending to be Puerto Ricans. The journey by boat across the Mona crossing was risky, many were caught and some did not make it and died in the rough shark-infested waters between the two islands (Pessar, 1995). Such attempts prompted several leading Dominican composers and singers to warn their

countrymen not use such a risky venture. “For example, merengue singer, Wilfrido Vargas, warns his listeners to avoid the rickety launches plying the waters between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico...” (Pessar, 1995, p.9).

For Dominican immigrants the pattern of immigration depended on who came first to the mainland and where that person came from. Dominican immigrants generally were a part of two immigrations: first, from the rural areas of the Dominican Republic to the urban parts of the island and second, from the urban environment in the home country to the urban environment in the United States. Families often immigrated starting with one or two family members at a time, leaving the rest of the family at home until there was enough money to sponsor bringing over the remaining family members. Often in the case of Dominican immigrants, a female family member came to this country first which was a pattern also found among our respondents. In one of Pessar’s studies, fifty-six percent of the immigrants who arrived from the Dominican Republic were women (1990).

It was not uncommon for Dominicans who were poorer and less educated to have trouble with U.S. consular officials in securing a visa (Pessar, 1995). U.S. consular officials in the Dominican Republic would not grant visas to individuals whom they believed might need welfare or would likely be persistently unemployed once they were living on the mainland (Weyland, 1998). The fact that the U.S. government had so much control over which member of a Dominican family could come and who had to stay home meant that Dominicans had little control over their family situation. Legal Dominican immigrants were often forced to struggle and cope with problematic issues when immigrating. After securing an economic foothold, the new immigrant was able to obtain immigrant visas and plane tickets allowing family members to join him/her though this might take many years (Duany, 1994). It was a common practice among immigrants, besides Dominicans, living in the U.S. to regularly send money to remaining family members which also maintained their ties to their country.

These newly-arrived immigrants usually stayed with relatives, who had earlier immigrated to the United States, relying on a tight

network system of familial and kinship relationships for support. Dominican immigrant households tended to be flexible and accommodating to arriving relatives as it would be inconceivable not to since it was accepted that family came first. Friends, acquaintances or other connections of established immigrants could also be depended upon to provide a temporary home to the new arrivals. The common pattern of family members immigrating to the United States, preceded either by a male or female relative, was reflected in one experience of a respondent as seen in the following statement:

“(Our) business was not doing too well... I then decided to contact my sister who was in the States... for information on how to come to this country. Months later my papers were done and off to New York I was going...”

Close family members, friends or sponsors were also helpful in finding work for the new comers. The newly arrived female immigrants took any job they could obtain especially in the garment industry and at wages that were higher than they made in the Dominican Republic but considered low by American standards (Pessar, 1995). These low paying jobs were all that were available to the new female immigrants due in part to low levels of education and the fact that these new immigrants usually did not speak English. Among Dominican women in their country, the “illiteracy rate in 1991 was 17.9 percent with 22.3 having a secondary education and 6.7 percent having attended one to five years of university” respectively (Weyland, 1998, p.49). In the labor market, for immigrant Dominican women the mean income was \$12,791 a year in 1990 (Hernández & Rivera-Batiz, p.101) and a slight increase of \$12,923 in 1999 (p.46). As with this group in general, most of our women respondents took low-paying unskilled jobs where they worked long hours with little chance of promotion. Despite the low wages, for a number of respondents, the wages were more than what many of them could earn in the Dominican Republic.

“When my mother was born (in the Dominican Republic), the Trujillo (Rafael Trujillo was the dictatorial leader of the country from 1930 to 1961) era was almost over. However, my mother did not have any professional degree so that she had to work in the fields which was also very difficult. My mother’s salary in 1974 was \$60 in Dominican money which is equivalent to \$304 minimum salary in U.S. money monthly. My mother also worked selling clothes because it was difficult to support a family with \$60 Dominican pesos salary monthly.”

“In 1965 my mother first interviewed for employment. The type of work at that time that she could find was factory work. She went and got the job on her own. There were signs on street walls about job openings. My mother only had one job during that time. The job my mother did was giving work to every worker in the factory where the women sewed pajamas. My mother would give them parts of arm sleeve cloth. My mother was in charge of assigning orders to the sewers. She made three dollars an hour doing this.”

The Dominican parents who came to the United States legally were not always granted visas for all of their children. A male or female parent, who immigrated to the United States before the rest of the family could join, was required to show documentation verifying he or she could economically support the entire family. Thus, bringing over one’s children from the home country was often done on a separate basis for either each child or a group of children depending on the size of the family. Families were separated for indefinite periods of time, an occurrence that happened often among many of our Dominican respondents. Dominican mothers and fathers who immigrated and were not financially able to bring children with them, or who were unable to obtain visas for all their children, had to make other living arrangements for the children. It was a common practice for the children to stay with relatives, for example their grandparents, for a length of time. Children would live a number of years with their relatives until parents were able to earn sufficient money to bring them to the mainland (*Newsday*, December 21, 1986).

For many Dominicans, times of separations from family members, who were forced to stay behind in the Dominican Republic, were often long and sorrowful. Peña-Gratereaux, a resident of Washington Heights since 1965 and a family and community mediator for 17 years, considers herself a “product of the Dominican Diaspora” (2001, p.14). In setting up writing workshops for newly arrived Dominican children and adolescents, their essays of how “confused” they felt in their new environment are presented in her book, *Recuerdos de una inmigración: testimonios de niños inmigrantes dominicanos = Memories of an immigration: Testimonies of Dominican immigrant children* (2001) which offers some of their thoughts and reactions, and are presented here in the children’s own words without corrections by the editor. Comments by two children who stayed with relatives were:

“I spent most of my time with my grandparents and I miss them very much” (p.29).

“I used to live with my grandmother then I went to live with my siblings at my mother’s house. I lived in the country in a community called Los Cocos de Jacagua. My aunts and uncles lived in the same community... I miss my relatives... but the person I miss most is my niece” (p.31).

Two of our respondents told their stories of separation and reunion that were common for Dominican families.

“...one of the hardest things that I (grandmother) had to deal with was leaving my children behind and the passing of my mother. My mother passed away several months after I entered the U.S. making it impossible for me to return for the burial...”

“I (grandmother) then decided to contact my sister who was here in the states for information on how I can come to this country. Months later my papers were done and off to New York I was going. I arranged for [grandfather] to stay with our children in his mother’s



house while I settled and sent out for them later. It took no more than 6 months to reunite with my family here in the States.”

Children were brought to the U.S. when parents became more prosperous and were able to take care of their children and received the appropriate visas. The transitions for children living with different sets of relatives and then migrating to the United States caused, and still causes, various degrees of personal and cultural stress for the children and their families. The practice of mothers leaving children in the care of the maternal grandmothers, particularly when the mothers left the country to migrate to the United States, was prevalent in this culture as a whole (Duany, 1994) and among our respondents. “Family reunification usually takes between three and six years, sometimes more... youngsters who were left in the Dominican Republic when they were eight years old were reunited with their parents as 14 year old teens” (Peña-Gratereaux, 2001, p.14). The parents struggled to survive in the new country and often sent hard-earned money home for expenses to relatives involved in child-caring. These separations from children and other family members often lasted many years (Duany, 1994). One interviewer in our study learned that:

“My mother came to this country six years after my grandmother... She had just turned 15 years old, and was the responsible adult on this trip which she took with her younger three siblings. They were the last four children to migrate. Their older brother and sister had arrived two years prior. They had to migrate first for working purposes.”

For Dominican immigrants with large families, it was not unusual for remaining family members to come to the United States alone, with a sibling or with the rest of the family members. One third generation Dominican respondent stated:

“...my grandmother decided with my grandfather to immigrate to New York... the decision was made and [within] less than a year all her nuclear family moved to New York. My grandfather

came down quickly, found a job as a furniture maker and on weekends as a musician. Then he sent for the eldest son of twenty and my grandmother. Shortly after came all three daughters and a son. Before the New Year started, the remaining four boys came including my father. The New Year of 1976 started well off because everyone was together again and she (grandmother) felt at peace. She stated 'I never felt such pain of agony than the time my family was separated.' The eldest son was twenty and the youngest was five when my grandparents started a new life in the United States."

According to the 1980 and 1990 Census, the Dominican population in New York City increased 165% during that decade (Hernández & Rivera-Batiz, 2003, p.5). This increase meant that Dominicans were immigrating at the very time that the type of jobs Puerto Ricans took in an earlier time were rapidly disappearing. While illegal migration has continued unabated for more than twenty years, the flow of legal immigration continued to rise according to a January 1997 report from New York City's Department of City Planning. From 1990 to 1994 over 110,000 new immigrants from the Dominican Republic arrived in the city (Torres-Saillant & Hernández, 1998). Since many Dominicans who immigrated often had less than a high school education, the disappearance of these low-paying factory jobs had a significant impact on immigrants who found themselves employed in the service industries which paid even less than the factory jobs that Puerto Ricans had taken in an earlier generation. Many Dominican immigrants remained unemployed or were forced to be pushcart vendors or did other odd jobs (Duany, 1994; Hernández & Torres-Saillant, 1996).

## Initial Adaptation

Families normally settled in predominantly Spanish speaking areas which helped to ease the process of transition for the new immigrants. Many times people from the same villages or regions in the countries of origin settled together on the mainland. For instance, many immigrants from the Dominican Republic, who settled in the Washington Heights area of New York City, came originally from the Cibao region of the Dominican Republic. Washington Heights was the most common destination for Dominicans. (Duany, 1994; Cocco De Fillippis, 1994). When the new immigrants adapted to the environment on the mainland, they used the culture they left behind as a frame of reference maintaining as much of their traditions as possible in the new environment (Duany, 1994). Dominicans in the Washington Heights section and other areas of Dominican settlement often followed the same pattern (Cocco De Fillippis, 1994). One description of the neighborhood presents a vibrant and colorful scene:

“Vendors sell flowers, bananas and oranges from the stands under the George Washington Bridge. Merengue blasts from sidewalk stereos and from the windows of passing cars. Signs in Spanish advertise a Dominican medical center, a sports club, and a club” (Dwyer, 1990, p.63).

Our respondents also spoke of similarities among their neighborhoods and one respondent offered the following.

“I live in a Hispanic neighborhood where the majority of the people are Dominicans. In this neighborhood everyone knows each other... When summer time comes, everyone goes outside... People come out and enjoy the weather... Most of the times what they do is sit and make *cuentos*, stories, about their own lives or someone else’s — in other words, sit and gossip. Men will bring out a small table to play dominoes (and) while they play, they drink... There is always someone playing loud music which everyone enjoys as they sit and take some cool air.”

When many immigrants formed their communities wherever they decided to reside in the United States, it was a common pattern to re-establish familiar and traditional customs, practices, the language and the food commonly eaten in the country of origin in these new communities. This need and desire to transplant and replicate the familiar language and customs of the countries of origin to their new environment was, and continues to be, common for many immigrants to the United States. Among Dominicans dating back to 1945 when fewer than 10,000 Dominicans lived in the United States, voluntary associations formed beginning as networks of friends, acquaintances, and families. These recreational and social organizations originally focused on celebrating family events such as weddings, birthdays and similar family events (Torres-Saillant & Hernández, 1998).

Many Dominicans who immigrated encountered difficulties when coming to the United States. Like other Dominicans who preceded them to the mainland, our respondents' experiences and the experiences of their families reflected the difficulties of their own immigration experiences — some came alone and faced hardships and obstacles without either family support or the help of any relatives or friends, many were able to bring their families with them or re-unite with members after long periods of separation and others were fortunate enough to join relatives or friends already living on the mainland and benefit from the advantages of this established network of support. As one respondent said, "My father was the first person to come to this country. He then brought my mother. The following year all of her family was here."

Another reason for immigrants transmitting their traditions from the old country to the new was a consequence of their negative reactions to what they experienced in confronting the realities of their new surroundings with its harsh, unfriendly and often ugly urban environment. In contrast to the warm, lush, tropical beauty of the island of Hispaniola that they had left behind, many of our respondents were shocked by the urban scene of the New York metropolitan area and a number were also disappointed by what they discovered to be life in America. As Hernández (2002) noted, young Dominicans growing up in Washington Heights could see

the “scenic view of New Jersey,” along with the Harlem and Hudson rivers, but “do not experience Washington Heights as an idyllic terrain” (p.112) since looking at that state across the Hudson River was a contrast to their own community with its “ugly symbols of poverty, overcrowding, social destitution, and architectural decay” (p.112). A study by The Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy and the New York University of Law found “...that immigrants and minorities... continue to live in deficient, overcrowded housing in New York City. Specifically, 34% of Dominicans live in housing with three or more serious problems, including heating and plumbing breakdowns, no bathroom or kitchen and rat infestation” (López, 1998, p.87). The fact that “in 1990, almost one of every two Dominican homes lived below the poverty line and one in every five did not have a phone” coupled with the “worst scenario of crowded homes in the borough as the lack of homes available combined with increasing rents... forced many Dominican families to double up and resort to informal housing arrangements such as the spontaneous creation of rooms in the basements of many apartment buildings” (Hernández, 2002, p.5) clearly describes the housing conditions Dominican immigrants were forced to contend with.

Perhaps what was disheartening for many of the immigrant Dominican children coming to New York City were the realities of living in an alien, urban environment with its “drug addicts... violence and rats” (Peña-Gratereaux, 2001, p.133). The author, a resident of Washington Heights for a number of years, developed writing workshops for children to express their feelings being in a new country. Translations of the children’s writings were done without corrections. Further written observations by the children in sharing their negative feelings are reflective of their awareness of the emotional coldness and dangers associated with living in New York City:

“I guess you could say that I didn’t like it here so much because over here I can’t play the way I could over there [Dominican Republic]. Here I am in a lot of danger, even in schools I am in danger” (p.49).

“When I arrived I found it was snowing in this country, it looked sad and lonely. People were locked up in their apartments, watching television and studying. I cried a lot because I wanted to go back to my country” (p.83).

But there were happy memories of life in the Dominican Republic that the children shared which revealed their feelings about the country they had left:

“One of the things that I miss is that in Santo Domingo people are very nice and talkative” (p.33).

“I am 14. When I came to this country three years ago I felt very bad because I had left that beautiful country that is my country. Its beaches, its schools, its nightclubs... I wanted to go back to my country. Over there I used to ride horses in the country, milk the cows, carry water from the rivers and harvest yucca” (p.83).

Our respondents often discussed the transition from being in the country of origin and staying with relatives to returning to the nuclear family in the environment of a new country. The kind of stress that our respondents discussed between parents and children was also reflected in other studies that showed there was often considerable stress on the children of parents who had immigrated to the United States (López, 1999; Medina, 2001). First, they suffered from being away from parents. Second, they then were being forced to make a rapid adjustment, once on the mainland, to a new and unfamiliar society. Third, they were expected to maintain values of the old society where the parents' authority and control over children would not be questioned (Pessar, 1995). Last, when parents migrated back and forth from the mainland in their search for economic success or improvement, children were not only often subjected to the interruptions of their schooling, but at times suffered from being in two different cultures.

Long separations from their children among Dominican families added to the adjustment of finally reuniting. Sometimes parents were able to visit their children in the country of origin during

separations but these visits tended to be infrequent. When children were re-united with their families, the period of adjustment for both being together again took time. There were immigrant children who were able to make a healthy adjustment but there were also parents who were affected by the fear that after so many years of separation, children would no longer respect them (Pessar, 1995). For those parents who had been separated from their children for a number of years, the lack of respect for parental authority meant that children with behavioral problems would be sent back to the Dominican Republic to be raised by grandparents with traditional values (Pessar, 1995). Once parents decided to remain on the mainland, children often became so acculturated to the American way of life that they no longer felt comfortable when returning to the Dominican Republic. One young girl in Peña-Gratereaux's writing workshop wrote that although her mother expected the daughter to behave in her mother's presence, the mother did not treat her in the same manner as she did with the young girl's siblings. What she found most embarrassing was her mother's treatment of friends whom she brought home. Her mother would throw them out of the house if she did not like them (2001). Such feelings were also evident among our respondents as voiced in the following from one:

"I grew up in the Dominican Republic... and when I went back for the first time, I felt displaced, non-centered, lost. There was no identification inside of me... I realized I had changed very much. My aunt says that I am a 'wanna be White American.' I have adopted every value, belief and moral this country has taught me... I don't want to be a housewife nor a mistress... I want to provide for myself without depending on others."

A second effect of immigration that was felt by many in the Dominican community was a separation from the culture of the Dominican Republic and placement in American society causing conflicts in the awareness of being between two cultures. Feelings of displacement among second and third generation respondents also were not uncommon. Dominicans on the mainland "re-developed" their own culture in many ways including their own language —

“Spanglish” — which encompassed the usage of words and phrases of both Spanish and English. While this mixture of both languages helped Dominicans survive on the mainland by giving them new terminology to describe their different environment and also acting as a transition to learning English, it often created difficulties for them when returning to the Dominican Republic as their lack of fluency in Spanish set them apart from the islanders. Not fully accepted as Dominicans by the native Dominicans of the island, these Dominicans living on the mainland were referred to as “Los Dominican yorks” (Guarnizo, 1994). Molina’s 1998 interview of Junot Díaz, a Dominican writer who sees himself as first generation, referred to this feeling of displacement that “among first and second generations of Dominican writers, there were a large number raised and born in the United States who have to find a way to mediate between Dominican and American culture... they face the dilemma of not being a Dominican nor Dominican American writer but also being labeled an ethnic writer. There is this “duality of being a foreigner, ‘other’, or an outsider in Santo Domingo ‘when I go back to the island, I am an immigrant and in here... it has been 20 years, I am living here and I still considered myself an immigrant.” (pp.66-67). Perhaps the feeling of not belonging anywhere neither in New York nor Santo Domingo can be found in the phrase by Gustavo Pérez Firmat that begins Díaz’s collection of short stories in *Drown*: “... how to explain to you that I don’t belong to English though I belong nowhere else” (Díaz, quotation, no page number). A sense of conflict in a cross cultural identity for immigrant Dominican adolescents as to being Dominican or American was not uncommon as observed in a case study of a young girl who was making the transition from adolescence to adulthood. “The more separate she becomes, the more void she experiences within herself” (Paulino & Burgos-Servedio, 1997, pp.132-133). An adolescent participant struggling with a need to retain her Dominican cultural heritage in Gray’s study (2001) said she was afraid she would stop growing by staying in the Dominican Republic. She saw the island as being isolated “from what is really happening in education and the arts.” Without exposure to the United States, she would “die spiritually” (p.197). Another participant in the study found that



the struggle with her identity was not as “intense” on the island: “Everybody has an identity and you’re accepted...” (p.197) whereas this participant believed this ideal was lacking among Dominicans on the mainland. One positive commentary, however, from Peña-Gratereaux’s work was made by a young adolescent who wrote:

“Now that I understand how difficult it is to move away from your roots... how difficult it is to leave your way of life to go to such a different country. I like my country [Dominican Republic] a lot... people are closer and stay with you in good times and bad times... This country [the U.S.] has been good to me to get ahead in my studies and to see life from another point of view and to realize... that outside my environment there are many things to see...” (2001, p.85)

In our study two of the respondents shared candidly their own problems caught between two cultures:

“When I look back at my childhood, I feel I was deprived because I was left in Santo Domingo for four years, then brought to a new environment and raised under strict supervision. I do not regret or hate them (parents) for the way they raised me because I would not be who I am today. But I resent them for leaving me behind and placing so much responsibility on me.”

“While my parents were in New York, my sister who was two, stayed with my grandparents on my mother’s side (in the Dominican Republic)... she only remembers... things like... grandfather not letting me go anywhere, not even to the corner store. If I did something that was not in accord with him, I would get hit. I also remember the day Dad and Mom came to get me. My aunt told me, “These are your parents. Tell them you love them.’ When she arrived in the United States, she remembers feeling scared and withdrawn. She was in a new environment with people she really did not know. ‘I felt left out, yearning to be where I belonged in Santo Domingo with my real family’... coming to New York was a real cultural shock because both environments were totally different.”

Perhaps Torres-Saillant & Hernández (1998) best summed up these dissimilar attitudes in *The Dominican Americans* when they argued that despite adult Dominicans choosing to see themselves nationally or culturally, it is their children who “see the United States as their... home. Children born here or brought to this country prior to adolescence, educated in the United States, do not share the nostalgia of those older folks who might still hesitate to love this country as their own” (p.151). According to Torres-Saillant & Hernández:

“...I think, in the first generation of American born Dominicans that this hope should lie. They will have no excuse for doubting that this community is here to stay. For reasons which are peculiar to their own historical development, this generation will have no choice but to take in its own hands the reins of its destiny. Free from the tie to “la patria,” the homeland, these Dominican Americans will mentally be in the position to assert their presence as a New York minority and to wage a social battle for which their parents were inadequately equipped” (1998, p.151).

A third effect was the discovery among the Dominican immigrant children that the traditional roles held by their father and mother, when living in the Dominican Republic, changed for the children in the United States. While first generation parents often did not rush to learn English (Duany, 1994), their children had to learn the English language rapidly to survive in the public schools. In contrast to the traditional male being the household head and responsible for the family’s well-being in the Dominican Republic, immigrant children became the intermediaries for their family as a result of their greater English-language skills and knowledgeable ability to interact with U.S. officials and bureaucracies (Pessar, 1995). The children were becoming skillful as translators for their parents who expected their children to handle responsibilities such as translating monthly bills and helping parents to fill out forms. Among our respondents who came here as children, the transition was difficult for several reasons: the process of learning to re-adjust to living with one’s own immediate family again, attempting to

acquire a completely new and unfamiliar language, adapting to a different environment and confronting the discrimination and racism often directed at them in their new surroundings.

For a number of our respondents who came to the mainland during their early years, their first experience in American society was a traumatic one when they attended schools where they encountered prejudice and racism along with the difficulties in learning a new language. Two respondents shared their experiences in these commentaries:

“The children of the neighborhood couldn’t understand why I spoke a different language. This was my first encounter with racial discrimination among my peers. Almost everyday in school I would get into a fight during lunch because the kids didn’t want to hear me speak Spanish to my twin sister. We both had to fight for our lives and learn English quickly.”

“She noticed the difference in the environment and society when she started school (in New York City). Her first school... she was forced to learn a language she did not comprehend and socialize with students that did not understand her. ‘I do not remember when exactly I picked up the language but it seemed to have happened overnight.’”

Many of our respondents discussed the discord between themselves and their parents, who wanted to raise their children in a traditional manner, as the respondents were adapting to the values of the new society. The tendency to compare the behavior of children growing up on the mainland with the standards of expected social behavior in the countries of origin is not new. But for many of our respondents, particularly the second and third generations, the social behavior in the country of origin that was demanded of young people were also expected to be observed and followed as they were growing up in the United States. Pessar contended that the immigrant parents’ loss of authority and control over their children were the results of two factors: first, parents who worked long hours could not supervise their children and second, the

conflict of cultural concepts between Dominican and American societies on disciplining children (1995). Many Dominican parents also criticized the schools and child welfare agencies for undermining their parental authority and interfering with what parents considered appropriate discipline for their children. "Parents believe that children in the U.S. are given 'too many rights,' and that savvy children take advantage of U.S. child abuse laws to prevent their parents from effectively disciplining them at home" (Grossman, 2002, p.304). The lack of communication between parents and teachers was another factor in the conflict and was further exacerbated by the Dominican immigrants' belief that the school represented a scientific approach to education, one that does not adjust to the needs and customs of their culture (Castillo, 1996). Grossman's study (2002) of Dominican adolescent immigrant students in a semi-suburban Maryland community also found that the Dominican students seemed to have the hardest time among the recent immigrant groups to adjust to American school culture. They were expected to conform to "passive behavior" in the American classrooms, their self-concept and academic abilities were affected not only by the teachers' racial stereotyping and prejudice but also by other Latinos and last, with many Dominican families moving back and forth between countries, the adolescents were faced with having "a harder time feeling fully accepted in either culture" (p.2).

Coping with the shift in the role of the Dominican children upon coming to the mainland was difficult for parents and children. The expectation among Dominican immigrant parents that their children's acceptance of their authority and that their social behavior on the island would be the same in the United States was challenged by the children themselves. Immigrant children learned about American values such as individualism and independence in school and in the media causing their behavior to be problematic for parents. Permission had to be obtained from parents if children wanted to socialize away from home whether for dancing or going to the movies and they had to be accompanied by a reliable adult as a chaperone (Pessar, 1995). Such cautious monitoring reflected not only parents' fears of violence and drugs but gave them "some

degree of control over children” who were challenging “traditional lines of parental privilege and authority” (p.66). However, young men had less restrictions than young women since the protection of daughters was insisted upon by Dominicans as “propriety and chastity are interlinked and that both communicate the respectability of the girl’s family and her suitability as a good wife” (p.64). One third generation respondent was candid about the problems she was having with her mother over the former’s desire to adapt to some of the accepted customs of mainland society as seen in her comment:

“My relationship with my mother was falling apart because of the many differences we had. My mom doesn’t want me to be out at late hours of the night. I find it perfectly normal for me to be out with my friends at night. My mom says only ‘*putas*’ (whores) did that...”

## **Changing Educational Expectations for Women of the Second Generation**

In the second generation educational levels for women who were interviewed for this research increased in contrast to what the first generation had attained. Educational levels were still much lower for women than for men and a college education was rare for either men or women particularly for the poorer classes and certainly among our respondents. Nevertheless, almost all of the students' mothers could read and write and had at least a partial secondary education. A number of the second generation respondents interrupted their education because of various circumstances such as working to help with family finances, lack of sufficient funds to continue schooling, an early marriage, inability to provide adequate childcare arrangements in order to finish school, divorce or conflicts with job or employment schedules. Many women did eventually return to school to finish their high school education and sometimes continued on to higher education as seen in this respondent's experience.

“My mother... just wanted to finish high school and get it over with. At one time in the 11th grade she stopped going to school. She told my grandmother that she was going to quit because she did not like the environment at her school... My grandmother told her that the only way to get ahead in life was through education... that if one was not educated, one was a failure. When my mother graduated from high school, she did not go to college right away... when my father decided to go and get an education... my mother decided to get one also... four years later, she got a bachelor's degree in Accounting and graduated with honors.”

Other respondents had similar goals:

“Her education (aunt) began in a rural area called “La Seiba de Hostos” in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. She was educated in one of the best Catholic schools of the city of San Cristóbal. She won an award to attend the school because her parents were too

poor to pay for private school... the head of the school was so strict, she had to get up at 5 a.m. everyday and do a lot of chores and then be ready at 8 a.m. to begin class. She studied there until she graduated as a teacher. Later when she was working, she began the University study to get her bachelor degree in education.”

“My mother was very ambitious. Aside from her twelve years of proper schooling she had other types of training. She graduated from Wilfred Beauty School as a cosmetologist, and later had training to become a sales agent, a career for which she followed for twelve years of her life.”

Many of the first generation women migrated to the United States with the hope of improving their own lives and that of their children particularly in the area of education. The eagerness to educate their children was often seen in economic sacrifices made to send children to parochial schools which were preferred over public institutions. Education for the children of our second generation respondents represented a key step toward the social and economic advancement that they sought in the United States. Parents saw their immigration to the United States as an act of *sacrificio* (sacrifice), for the interest of their children (Pessar, 1995). One of the findings in Medina’s study (2001) of the academic success of high-achieving Dominican middle (intermediate) school students in an urban school in New York City was that “all parents, regardless of their educational background, shared the same enthusiasm in encouraging their children to excel academically and to pursue a college education” (p.163). A number of second generation respondents offered their stories:

“I remember her (mother) words like an angel giving us advice. ‘Mis hijos, estudien que eso es lo único que yo le puedo dar. Si uno se propone algo lo logra. Tu ve yo, si no me hubiera cargado de muchachos, yo hubiera llegado a algo, pero mi papá no me dejó seguir estudiando. Para colmo, ahora tengo este hombre que solamente vale lo que él dice. Estudien mis hijos, estudien.’ (My children, study. That’s the only thing I can give you until I can. If

I did not have seven children, I would achieve something in my life, but my father did not allow me to continue my studies. Now, I have this man (husband) who thinks he is the only one who can talk. Study, my children, study.)”

“My mother completed the eighth grade... My mother was fourteen years old when my grandmother took her out of school. My mother wanted to go to school, but my grandmother said that she was too old to be in school. For my grandmother, my mother was old enough to think about getting a husband and not to think about school. My mother did not have the opportunity to complete her education. But she tried everything to keep us in school.”

Pita’s study (2000) found that gender roles are changing in the Dominican Republic and in Latino communities in the United States. Factors that challenge male authority were a woman’s age, educational level and the type of work she did. Gender roles also become “less rigid” as a result of acculturation, higher levels of education and increased participation in the labor force by women. “Girls in New York City are not so sheltered as their mothers were in the Dominican Republic; they take classes in leadership and sex education that would not have been possible back home” (p.19). The commentary by one of our second generation respondents below would seem to underscore the expectations for women now:

“I (mother) always had hopes and goals for my children that some of them would be in the future professionals, have a good job, and a family. My oldest son, however, dropped out of school at a young age and decided to work with his father in the grocery store. My oldest child which is my daughter has made a lot of my dreams, goals, and hopes come true. She is soon to be graduating from college and get an associates degree in Early Childhood Education... My youngest son is still in high school. They all have made me very happy, and made most of my hopes and goals I had for them come true.”

One of the few films on Dominican immigrants, *My American Girls: A Dominican Story*, followed the life in a year of the Ortiz



family particularly focusing on the relationship between the mother and her three American-born daughters. The film captured the cultural conflicts of the daughters between their Dominican values and American values. The oldest achieved “success” with an education: finishing high school and going on to a higher education degree at Columbia University. Her two younger sisters in high school were constantly caught in “tug and pull” situations between the parents’ expectations for them to be dutiful and obedient daughters while they found themselves questioning their Dominican cultural customs and traditions. All three stated in the film that they were happy to be in the United States and would visit the Dominican Republic for vacations, but did not want to live there. One significant aspect about the film was its ability to capture clearly the effects of immigration on the educational level of these second generation women who found that education, including higher education, was accessible to them in contrast to their mother’s educational attainment of some formal schooling in the Dominican Republic.

One should consider also the results of Penalo’s study (1987) which examined the similarities and differences between first and second generation Dominican mothers and their child rearing practices in New York City. Looking at the influences of education, years in the United States and their marital status, she found that there were clear differences between the two generations. The majority of the mothers who were born and raised in the Dominican Republic, having lived in their country with its own history, politics, language, lifestyles and traditions, “retained their own culture and traditions keeping themselves in close-knit circles of family and friends from their country of origin” (p.14). Their daughters, also mothers, were either born in the Dominican Republic but raised and educated in New York City or born and raised in New York City. According to the study “second generation Dominican mothers were more liberal in their child rearing practices, unlike their mothers who came to the United States with an already-made set of values. The liberal child rearing attitudes of the second generation Dominican mothers were due to three major results: first, having emigrated to the United States at a very early stage, between 1-2 years of age or

being born in the United States, they gained knowledge of their ancestors' cultural values... but also experienced and embraced the new culture, through positive and negative experiences, friends, etc." (p.14). A second factor was that these mothers, who were married, were more liberal in the way they raised their child as they had husbands who shared similar values on the responsibility of raising and disciplining their children allowing the mothers to be more lenient since someone else could also keep the children under control; and third, the number of years living in the United States affected their becoming acculturated despite being raised in a Dominican household with cultural values, language, customs, etc. (pp.14-15). Penalo's study suggested strongly that the acculturation process had begun with the second generation of immigrant Dominican women.

## **Education and the Changing Roles of Women in the Current, or Third Generation**

In the urban environment of the major cities of the Dominican Republic and afterwards in the New York metropolitan area, the restrictions on the education of women began to weaken though certainly they did not disappear as a force in the lives of women. In addition, education in the Dominican Republic was more accessible for this generation than it had been during the lives of the first generation respondents living in a rural environment and in the lives of the second generation respondents. As stated earlier, Weyland (1998) gave the percentages of Dominican women receiving education in 1993 which reflected for Dominican women that accessibility.

In the current generation the women interviewed usually had some college education and often had or were working on obtaining a college degree. The students performing the research were all in their second year of college and over 90% of the students planned to continue their education and pursue a four year degree (Bosworth & Soy, 2000). For female Dominican Americans in the 18-21 age range, the proportion enrolled in school/college in 2000 was 61.2 percent which is very close to New York City's average enrollment rate of 63.4 percent for this age group (Hernández & Rivera-Batiz, 2003, p.56). Though on the whole the educational levels of our respondents were higher in the third generation than was the norm for people from the Dominican Republic, the trend towards higher levels of education was consistent with trends in Dominican culture. At the City University of New York in fall 2002, 67.4 percent of the Dominican undergraduates were women: a large fraction, 57 percent, worked, with 42.7 percent employed 20 hours a week or more (p.57). Several of our respondents commented on their educational attainment in this generation:

“My sister did not want to go to school in the U.S. when she was young. She used to cry everyday, and tell my mother that she was sick. My mother kept sending her to school no matter how much she cried. My sister said that she is glad that my mother forced her

to go to school because if it had not been like that now she would have no education. My sister graduated with a B.A. in education and is now going for a master's. My sister said she has pushed herself to get an education because she still remembers my mother's words when she didn't want to go to school. My mother always said to us, 'Si yo no los forzo a ir a la escuela, mañana me lo van a reprochar' (If I do not force you to go to school, tomorrow you will blame me for not doing so)... my sister has a professional degree which allows her to get a better job and work for a better salary."

"In my family, we all finished high school. Three of us are in college. My oldest sister graduated in the Dominican Republic with a degree in accounting. My mother was the encourager for all this to happen."

"My sister's educational goals are very high. She wishes to be a psychologist... She has obtained her bachelor's degree and is now working on her master's degree. She believes... that the only way to get ahead is through education."

The view of educating Dominican women in three generations has changed both here and in the home country from being considered a poor idea or at least an unobtainable goal, to increasingly being considered essential to the economic survival of women and often of the family unit particularly among families that lived in urban areas in the Dominican Republic and those families that immigrated to the United States. The change in attitude on educating women might also be a reflection of the greater availability of schools for the current generation both for those who immigrated to the United States but also for those in the home country, given the large number of new schools built in the Dominican Republic since the fall of Trujillo in 1961. This changing view and the increased availability of schools are reflected in the increased levels of education found among the current generation of women both among our students and members of the culture in general.

“I have noticed that in my family, the level of education in three generations has increased. My grandmother did not go to school at all, my mother only completed the primary grades and all the members of our generation are going to college.”

The female respondents of the current generation no longer see their domain as solely the home and their husbands' domain as the world of salaried work. On the contrary, most of the women of this generation studied for this research, as well as the women in our classrooms, saw themselves as key economic supporters of the family and saw education as the key to being successful in their endeavors to support the family. Again, our students and the people they interviewed are reflective of the changes taking place in their culture though many more of our third generation respondents had some college education or were currently enrolled in college than would be the norm.

“My sister... is now eighteen years old... she tells me, ‘I promise you... I will finish school, get my teaching degree and marry when I’m 26 or 27 and have at least two children. You don’t understand. I have to do this for myself. I can love a man but never depend on one.’”

“My sister attended Hunter College where she majored in Psychology... she has been working at St. Luke’s Hospital for four years at the psychiatric unit. ‘I was not forced to work until I got a degree because it was very important to acquire an education in order to get ahead in life...’ Women have become more independent as a result of industrialization. Therefore they have become more career oriented. Since women have been oppressed from many jobs they have learned that without a degree we are nothing. No longer do women have to live under the conditions imposed by her husband. They can now be their own selves.”

Many of the third generation respondents viewed themselves as having been or being in the process of fulfilling the educational goals that their grandmothers would have attained if they had been

given the chance to do so. “I am the first person in my family who is going to graduate from college” is not only the proud affirmation of one respondent but may voice the culmination of a grandmother’s dream. Many of the respondents representing the third generation in this narrative study also typified this image. In striking contrast to their grandmothers who were unable to attain sufficient formal schooling in their country of origin, granddaughters in the newly adopted country often fulfilled their grandmothers’ wishes and hopes for a better education.

“We still carry our struggles. We want to encourage women. My aunt had limited sources when she was growing up but she succeeded in giving her daughter the opportunity to get a better education. This expanded her knowledge. My aunt then had the opportunity to take her daughter as a role model. In addition, I consider myself as a mirror for those two generations. I am following them and continuing the struggle for a better tomorrow. Even though I have had tough times in my life, I never gave up.”

## **Why the Educational Expectations Have Changed in Three Generations of Respondents**

The change in levels of education was widespread among our respondents. This change is both reflective of an expansion of educational opportunities in the Dominican Republic and the even greater opportunities available to our respondents in the United States. In most of our respondents' families education was stressed for the women of the third generation and often of the second generation, but not usually in the first. The female members of the family — mothers and grandmothers — were more likely among our respondents to believe their daughters and granddaughters needed an education than the male members — fathers and grandfathers of the family. This attitude was reflective of the cultures that we are discussing at least in the past. As is clear from the above, our respondents' feelings were representative of the society that they came from though in the third generation their average level of education was higher than the population as a whole.

This increased emphasis on educating women in the culture might be caused by increased urbanization and industrialization in the Dominican Republic and among our respondents, the greater need for an educated work force, both here and in the home country and the effect of immigration on the family structure, particularly as this change had affected the roles of women. In addition, this increased stress on education might represent the economic needs of the family unit to have two wage earners to survive and the increase in the number of single parent families among Dominicans where the sole wage earner was the woman. In the socioeconomic profile done in 2003 by Hernández & Rivera-Batiz, they found that in New York City Dominican families in poverty had a considerable number of female-headed families without a spouse (p.5).

Finally, Pita (2000) concluded in her study that further research on the issues of “gender socialization and gender roles should be considered in looking at the similarities and differences among different Latino communities, what differences there are between poor/working-class girls and middle-class girls and what differences and what similarities are there between Dominican, Cuban, Puerto

Rican and Mexican girls in the United States” within the context of education (p.163). In teaching English as a second language to adults, mostly Dominican women, her goal was “not to change their beliefs about gender, but to make them aware that their personal beliefs are conditioned by a socially constructed system and that there is no universal set of truths about gender” (p.164). She believed that in doing such research, reasons for a high percentage of “Dominican community college students (being) women, their reasons for dropping out, their persistence in seeking an education in the face of seemingly overwhelming obstacles and their relative difficulty acquiring language” (p.164) in comparison to men could be further examined.



## **Consequences of Immigration on Male/Female Relationships**

Immigration has severely affected the extended family among our respondents and in the Dominican American community. The proliferation of single-parent households is evidence of one way in which immigration has contributed to change the Dominican lifestyle. Research based in the 2000 census indicates that approximately half of the Dominican households in New York were single-parent households (Hernández & Rivera-Batiz, p.5). In another study the rates were slightly lower, 1980 the rate was 34%, in 1990 it was 40.7% and in 2000 it was 38.2% (p.32). But even these rates show well over a third of Dominican households being single-parent family households. We do want to mention that households officially defined as single-parent households were not always single. The single-parent women, for reasons of possibly collecting welfare and other benefits, often hid the presence of their husbands. However, in this type of Dominican families, the role of the men in the household was diminished because of their extended absence from the household and away from their children (Duany, 1994). As mentioned earlier, the traditional extended family has become less common.

A distinctive change in the status of male-female relationships in the household was one consequence during the study of these three generations of women. The power of the male in the household had decreased for the Dominican family living in the United States. Pessar's interviews in the 1980s with women planning to emigrate to the United States stated their acknowledgment that the men were in control of the household budget even though women often contributed on a regular or semi-regular basis. While some households followed a traditional, patriarchal pattern where family members gave all or part of their wages to the senior male who oversaw payment of household expenses, there were other households where the senior male member would collect the total income to give the wife an allowance to cover such basic expenditures as food and clothing (1995, p.50). Pessar (1995) discovered that immigrant Dominican women who started

working in New York City “won greater equality” and expected to be partners with their husbands in charge of the household since they were both “earning salaries” (pp.50-51). As women earned money, they believed that they could support the family as well, and they expected to enjoy some of the rights formerly limited to their husbands. Working in American society gave the women generally more opportunities to exert these newly acquired rights in the home. Besides the “single-mate pattern” where the domestic authority was seen with the senior male or the “multiple-mate pattern” of women commanding authority, Dominican settlement in New York had seen the development of a movement away from patriarchal relations and values toward a greater distribution of authority (Pessar 1987; 1990). Although these women generally had said that they worked “to help their husbands,” they believed that their contribution of a regular income should be met with increased power in making household decisions. Thus, these women believed that if both husband and wife were earning salaries, then they should equally rule the household. When the couple came to New York and the two were working, the woman felt herself equal to the man in ruling the home (Dwyer, 1990; Pessar, 1990).

It should be made clear that Dominican society is not stagnant and significant change is taking place in the society in regards to the economic power that women have relative to men. Weyland (1998) noted that the many Dominican immigrant women “opened their own businesses in New York, contributed to the ownership and management of commercial establishments even in traditional male-dominated areas” (p. 145). Many women who returned to the Dominican Republic and started businesses in Santo Domingo “increased their social prestige of their labor in the capital” due to their “experience in New York” (Weyland, 1995, p.145). Our respondents often talked about the changing role of men and women in the family as commented by one respondent.

“Right now I (mother) am living on my own and of course I am the dominant bread winner. Before, when I lived with my husband and children, we both were.”

One important reason for these changes being influenced by immigration was the greater ease Dominican women were able to obtain jobs after immigrating in contrast to the men particularly in New York City. The availability of low-paying work for an immigrant woman gave her as a wife an economic independence which she may not previously have had in the country of origin. The inequities that arose in a system in the Dominican Republic where a wife's role was confined to the home and where male privileges such as a greater liberty to appropriate household income and having extramarital relations did lead to marital disruptions despite women being advised to "avoid marital discord" by patiently accepting the situation or resigning themselves to their husbands' excesses (Pessar, 1995, p.48). Dominican women who immigrated to the United States after living and working in this country for a length of time encountered difficulties when sponsoring their husbands' migration. Women reported that newly-arrived husbands typically became unnerved by what they saw as an inversion of gender roles... a few reacted quite differently... insisting their wives had to become true breadwinners assuming responsibility for the major household expenses instead (pp.56-57). Marital discord became a contentious situation when husbands' unemployment continued along with their insistence on maintaining their perks of male privileges in the household (p.58). As noted by Pessar (1995), some relationships "founder in the wake of men's confusion and anger over their appropriate status and responsibilities when female partners acquire payments from the State as they see welfare benefits giving the women control and independence" (p.59). This change in an economic relationship also could lead to divorce. One respondent discussed the differences in attitudes on the roles between Dominican men and women prior to immigration and afterwards:

"When Dominicans come to the United States, they import their beliefs and traditions. The men try to adhere to their way of life while the women quickly realize that they do not have to conform with the 'Dominican standards'. Dominican woman in the United States view marriage on a more equal basis. One of the factors leading to this is that most Dominican women work and

contribute to the maintenance to the family. No longer are they totally dependent on their husbands to provide for their children... my family believes that Americans are more respectful of their wives... than Dominicans are.”

Women in the current generation were far more likely to divorce their husbands than in previous generations. This trend observed among our respondents had also been observed among immigrants from the Dominican Republic. One particular factor responsible for divorces especially among immigrant Dominican women was the husband’s non-acceptance in sharing the decision-making with the wife when her economic earnings were a major contribution to the household. When husbands refused to be equal partners, the women sometimes left. In Pessar’s sample study of fifty-five Dominican female immigrants (1987; 1990), eighteen were divorced or separated from a partner while in the U.S., and in most instances, the primary reason leading to the breakup was the man’s reluctance to temper his patriarchal attitudes and behavior.

## **Effects of Immigration on Respondents: Looking Back on Accomplishments in the Face of Adversities on the Mainland Among Respondents**

Although a very few of our respondents did not consider their immigration experience a positive one, most of our respondents when looking back at the experience of having immigrated here felt positive about what they had accomplished. Many discussed their families' struggles beginning with the first generation respondents upon their arriving on the mainland, at having to work at jobs demanding long hours at many types of arduous work and the continuous efforts to survive despite economically poor living and working conditions. Among our respondents and their families who immigrated to the mainland were also the feelings of pride in their accomplishments despite the difficulties faced in adjusting to a different and unfamiliar culture and language as the following narratives reflected. They saw immigration as altering their lifestyle as it had among Dominicans in general (Bosworth & Soy, 2000) as voiced by these commentaries of our respondents:

"I (grandmother) said if I could do it (immigrating) all over again I would. I would once again migrate to this country where my wonderful grandchildren were born and I accomplished personal freedom from my husband. Here I learned to head a household and be the one and only provider. This too was an accomplishment on its own."

"I (grandmother) immigrated to the U.S. in search of improving my living conditions. Life in the Dominican Republic was very bad and many people were poor. I believe that moving to New York was something positive I did because I was able to get a good job which I held for over 25 years as a home attendant. The money I earned helped me get my own house back in my native country. I helped many of my relatives get out of the country because many were poverty stricken."

“My grandmother said that things were actually 100% better for her children because she came to the United States than when they had stayed in the Dominican Republic. Things were easier for them and the family. They had more education and job opportunities even though they were doing fine in the Dominican Republic. Jobs here in the United States pay much better than over there. As years passed, my children learned English as a second language which helped them a lot in finding new jobs and having better success in school.”

“My mother said, ‘I think things are better for my children now than what they were for me back then. It is easier to get an education now than it was back then for me. Even though I had many chances, I just didn’t know how to take advantage of them... my parents would have had to pay for my education but here in the United States I never had to pay anything for my children’s education.’”

## Changing Social Trends Among Respondents

We have noted several changes among our respondents in the areas of education, work and the changing role of women in the family structure. The first important change among our respondents over three generations was in their level of education. Most of our respondents saw this change as one of the positive effects of immigration. The respondents believed that education was more available here and that women were more actively encouraged to improve their education. However, they differed in that the third generation of our respondents generally achieved a higher level of education than the average immigrant female from the Dominican Republic. This difference could be anticipated since the target group of women in the study belongs --from the start-- to a college-connected set of families and in some ways differentiates them from the average immigrant. A second trend that was reflected among almost all of our respondents of the second and particularly the third generation was the changing roles among women in the family structure. Women, among our respondents, gained increasing power in the familial relationship. This change in the power relationships between men and women of this cultural group was not only reflected among our respondents, but in the culture as a whole both in the home country and on the mainland although our respondents and other Dominican women often saw the change in power relationships as a direct result of immigration and the effect of American culture (Pessar, 1991; Hernández & Torres-Saillant, 1996). This change frequently was reflected in increasing conflicts between men and women and an increasing number of single parent families (Pessar, 1987; Hernández & Rivera-Batiz, 2003). This phenomenon was common among our respondents. A high percentage of our respondents were female heads of single-parent families. After immigration, our respondents increasingly saw themselves either in conjunction with their husbands or by themselves as the breadwinner.

This important effect of immigration as a change in the power relationships between men and women allowed immigrant Dominican women to gain power in decision-making for the

family as the power of males was reduced. Abundant evidence demonstrated that this shift was a common experience of many immigrant groups as women began to make very different demands on men than they had in the countries of origin (Zambrana, 1982; Pessar, 1987). While immigration tended to affect the demands women made of men, immigration was often a reflection of the changing roles and relationships of men and women in the home countries. Many of the social changes in the relationships between immigrant men and women that had taken place in the United States were not just taking place among the immigrant women but also existed among native-born American women and their husbands. Also, these social changes were reflected, to some extent, in the Dominican Republic, particularly in the urban setting. While women did not openly defy attitudes in the household, they “have tended to circumvent their own vehicles to resist social subordination... with the deed than with the words... women have rarely waited for approval before taking action. Not only have they played an active role in revolutionary or nationalist movements in their country... but have outnumbered their male counterparts in the traumatic decision to leave home to secure their material survival abroad when need has so dictated” (Hernández & Torres-Saillant, 1996, p.45). The history of women struggling for equality in the Dominican Republic dates back to the last century through “actively combating social subordination” with a “legacy” including the “subversive actions of such women as the Mirabal sisters, Abigail Mejía, and Evangelina Rodríguez, as well as the collective acts of women who have defied accepted social practices and rules of conduct” (Hernández & Torres-Saillant, 1996, pp.45-46). These changes in the relationships between men and women that both often perceived were taking place, occurred after immigration and as a consequence of immigration. Though, more specifically, they seem to have to do more with larger access to salaried-employment opportunities than with the fact of migrating itself.

While many times it was hard to separate the subjective effect of immigration from the objective effect of immigration on our respondents, it was clear from their statements that our respondents saw the impact of immigration on their lives as



dramatic. Objectively it could be argued that many of the changes that took place, and are still taking place, among three generations of our respondents are taking place in the Dominican Republic. Subjectively, our respondents felt that the changes they discussed were the direct results of having immigrated to the United States and the influence of American culture on their lives.

Our study reflects that immigration to the U.S. offered educational opportunities to second generation respondents and in particular, to our third generation respondents who were college students involved in this research. Due to the necessities of providing help at home, first generation respondents had little to no access to education in the Dominican Republic. Immigration to the U.S. offered the second generation educational opportunities to finish elementary schooling, earn a high school degree and possibly continue on to college. The third generation who were U.S. native-born respondents went further beyond the second generation by actually going to college and succeeding in their academic pursuits.

The findings of this paper suggest that more research on the topic of this study should be explored. First, a comparative study can be conducted between the succeeding immigrant women in this study and those other immigrant women who have not been as successful. Can there be any explanatory difference between those Dominican women who are achieving college degrees in New York City and those who are not? Second, given that the overall trend of increased opportunities for Dominican women appear in the U.S. as well as in the Dominican Republic, another area of research can focus on the difference or contrast between what empowers these Dominican immigrant women in the U.S. vs. what is leading to empowerment in the Dominican Republic. The findings for these areas will augment this paper's study of the struggles that the female Dominican students in the CUNY campuses and their families from the Dominican Republic have faced in searching for success in the United States.

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