CHAPTER 8

ETHNOTHERAPY IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this volume we have analyzed a sample of the mainland Puerto Rican population to examine and test the proposition that a general loss of traditional family values—measured by gender-related values of the roles and behavior of family members—may contribute to the specific albeit unrelated deviant outcomes of alcohol and drug use. More specifically, we have contended that it is not necessarily the adherence to or lack of specific regulatory norms that may affect drug and alcohol use behaviors of Puerto Ricans in mainland United States, but rather adherence to or rejection of a general commitment to Hispanic values. This we have called “traditionalism,” particularly as it relates to the definitions of gender role behavior of Puerto Rican men and women. These values had once served, for women, as a brake or control mechanism on substance misuse. While many researchers, who have studied drug and alcohol abuse among Hispanics, including Puerto Ricans, have suggested acculturation alone as the explanation for changing substance use patterns of these Hispanics in the United States, we have attempted to demonstrate that rather, it is the movement away
from "traditionalism" itself that effects an increase in substance misuse and abuse.

The conclusions reached in this volume reflect the view that despite the social rhetoric of the past decade, it is not the absence of specific proscriptive values alone that must be rectified to prevent certain individual and social ills but rather it is the promotion of a "sense of tradition" itself that is needed. This sense of tradition can best be derived from the pride and knowledge about one's ethnic group, for it is \textit{ethnic pride and identification} that may provide, to paraphrase the psychologist Kurt Lewin (1948), "a firm ground on which to stand," i.e., a strong bond linking one's self through the family to a larger community. Individual and interpersonal choices, often emotionally compelling, may then be made with respect to one's ethnic community reference group. It is the strength of the ties to the culture of origin and its traditions that allows the immigrant to resist the stresses of acculturation that might otherwise result in their being vulnerable to substance use as a means of coping.

In our separate analyses of the impact that acculturation and traditionalism have on the use of alcohol and drugs among Puerto Ricans, as well as when the simultaneous effects of these factor were examined, we found that acculturation and traditionalism do not affect men and women in the same way. For males we found that as the level of acculturation increased so did the likelihood of: (1) being a drinker (regardless of the level of traditionalism), (2) the extent of drinking in different places (with higher traditionalism tempering this effect), and (3) being a drug user (with traditionalism not affecting the impact of acculturation). The level of drinking among men was not affected by either acculturation or traditionalism, even when these factors were combined.

Acculturation was found to have a preventive role to play in inhibiting the development of male alcohol problems but the opposite effect is true for traditionalism where we found that the greater the traditionalism, the greater the likelihood of problems (which we attribute