

The Ferrero Botero: Defining *Familia* in a Columbian Context

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Introduction

For more than a hundred years until the 1980s, Kinship for anthropologists has been the main institution and force driving relationships, social organizations, and cultural practices. With the revolutionary work of David Schneider, however, a different picture for seeing and theorizing social organization, especially for American anthropologists, emerged. For Schneider, kinship “is an artifact of the anthropologists’ analytic apparatus and has no concrete counterpart in the cultures of any of the societies we [anthropologists] studied” (A Critique 1984: vii). Kinship was no longer seen as an objective tangible or even native concept. Although the study of kinship has been revived by some anthropologists (especially British; see Carsten 2004), though with some modifications, most of the recent work has focused on identity and how social relations are differentially created and strengthened and how they affect social practices and culture. With the work of Schneider, kinship ceased to be the engine of society or the idiom in which other social institutions were inscribed.

How members of my family define *familia* may differ according to their positioning in the family, the positioning of the family in the larger regional, national, and global contexts, and in their individual life histories, among others. In a way, as Janet Carsten theorizes, kinship is made at the individual level, and is one of the reasons why people’s accounts of what *familia* is, like those described in this paper, are simply not the same, nor should one expect them to be (Carsten 2004). However, there are some other assumptions and beliefs that, because these members of my family were shaped by similar cultural and social forces in contemporaneous times and overlapping cultural spaces, could be categorized as being essentially the same; these are the core symbols that for my family, and perhaps many other Colombian families as well, are the criteria to define relatedness and kinship ties. I find evidence of the effect of these forces by analyzing the view that my brother Julián holds, who grew up with me and whom I consider to be my closest friend and family member. While comparing it to my own view of *familia*, I realize they are indeed remarkably similar.

We anthropologists have learned from Schneider that kinship does not exist, but it is rather a western bias, based on biological relationships, that has been traditionally used to analyze other societies and the effects that kinship has on them. Although Colombia, and certainly my family, is historically and linguistically related to European and American cultures, making many of their core symbols (such as the importance of blood or biological relatedness) resemble closely the idea of kinship, I have avoided this term, or in fact its translation into Spanish (*parentesco*) (Merriam-Webster Online 2010), for two main reasons.

First, is that the classical use of kinship, such as the one used by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, assumes that “all kinship bonds are of essentially the same kind” (Schneider 1984: 166) and that once a bond exists, the social roles or performance are thought to be

followed in a universally equivalent way. Kinship and the bonds that it creates, then, follow an innate biological relationship applicable to all cultures (Schneider 1984: 166). I knew that “blood” or “consanguinity” was going to be important in the way my interviewees traced their social ties. I also knew that their behaviors and perspectives toward people that are supposed to be of equivalent relation (such as aunts) followed some different criteria and reasons when defined as part of the *familia* or the degree of closeness to the individual. Although this closeness (traced through the degree of emotional bond, as explained later), as I was told by the interviewees, may indeed be aided by biological distance or genetic sharing, the criteria to create a true bond, includes variables, such as locality, sharing of experiences and quotidian activities, chemistry, sentimentalism, and even social class.

The other reason I did not use kinship or *parentesco* is that I knew that a *pariente* (roughly kinsperson), in the way my *familia* and I have previously used it, means superficially somebody who is related by blood but is not a member of the nuclear or primary family (the ones who live or grew up in the same house). *Familia*, on the other hand, is a much broader concept that includes both *familia primaria* (primary family) and *parentes*, which then includes *familia cercana* (kinsperson or close family) and *familia lejana* (distant family). These terms are much more meaningful in referring to the true bonds among its members. However, it is important to recognize that in people’s view, these categories are much more fluid and may depend on individual relationships. Nevertheless, the use of *familia* allowed me to get my interviewees to talk about people related by consanguinity, people living or growing up under the same roof, or beings (people and animals) that are so close (either physically or sentimentally) to the interviewee that they are considered family.

Context, Methodology, Constraints, and Biases

The following analysis is essential because it helps the reader understand the positioning in which I was placed as an interviewer, which illuminates the nuances and complexities of the answers given and how they are to be interpreted. Although I did not exactly place myself as the “ego” to interpret my *familia* networks, I did take my *familia primaria* as the center from where most interviewees were selected. The reasons for doing this are convenience in conducting the interviews, the fact that I know people better, which allows me to interpret and partially take into consideration their accounts and biases, and because my *familia primaria* is usually the core group which plans family reunions. My *familia primaria* gets both the Ferrero (my father’s side) and Botero (my mother’s side) *familias* together and maintains contact with each *familia* individually and as a group of *familias*. I presumed, moreover, that because people from paternal and maternal sides of my *familia primaria* grew up in slightly different contexts, although in the same city and social class, their ideas about family would be somewhat different.

Because of the centrality in which I have placed my *familia primaria*, the more marginal members of my *familia*, an uncle and a female cousin, are people with whom, because of locality, interaction, and family histories, communication has been rather sporadic but not absent. Still, I felt like I needed the necessary trust and familiarity to interview them without compromising our relationships as I asked personal and sometimes touchy questions. People who, by different degrees, I deemed to be marginal, which is an important concept to investigate in order to help establish the boundaries of the *familia* category, only make sense if one understands the relationship that my *familia primaria* has with those

members of the *familia*. Therefore, this concept of marginality is biased to my own opinion and perspective toward my *familia*, and the people I decided were marginal may not be the most marginal.

In the case of my cousin Andrea Dasen Ferrero, who is in her middle thirties, locality and social class have been the main criteria for choosing her as a marginal member of my *familia*. Andrea grew up and still lives in Quito, Ecuador, far enough from Manizales, Colombia, that she sees my *familia primaria* about once every two years. Furthermore, her father, Peter Dasen, was an economically successful Swiss citizen who was able to position Andrea's *familia primaria* in the highest social class in Ecuador, allowing them to be exposed to many different situations than my *familia primaria*, as a middle-upper class family from a middle-sized city, was exposed to. Finally, because of some life choices she has made, although most of our *familia* has supported her, she has also been highly criticized and marginalized.

In the case of Alvaro Botero Restrepo, who is in his fifties and is one of my maternal uncles, his marginality comes as a result of the fact that the *familia* of his wife, Catalina Toro, is also very united and tend to attract toward themselves their members and spouses, including Alvaro and his *familia primaria*. Even though Alvaro is my godfather and we used to spend much more time together, the problematic and criticized divorce of Catalina's brother from one of my maternal cousins (also Alvaro's niece), has caused Catalina's *familia* to become even more distant from my *familia*. This obligates Alvaro to decide to spend more time with his wife's (and also his) *familia* rather than my *familia*, in which he is included.

My other two interviewees are my brother Julián Ferrero Botero, who is twenty- six years old, and my father Carlos Ferrero Echeverri, who is sixty-three years old. They both still live in Manizales in the same house where my *familia* has been for the last fourteen years. They have similar views about what *familia* and its ramifications mean, but since one is father and the other son, there are some important "generational" and situational differences that add to the complexity of defining and creating meaningful analytic categories.

Methodologically, there are some other biases I need to admit. Since I interviewed people whom I know well, I avoided certain questions and took many answers and meanings for granted. I might have not asked many questions and focused on certain themes because I thought I knew some of the contours of what *familia* means for the interviewees. Moreover, although people used the term *familia* instead of *parentezco* or other ways to describe that group of relationships, it is important to note that they might have been led by my own questions to use those terms. Because my interviewing time was limited, conversation was not free-flowing but rather led by some pre-established questions that I used for interviewees. The interviewees, in their free-flowing speech, called people who live with them in the same household and people who are consanguine, no matter if they are close or distant, *familia*. However, there were, indeed, some hints of distinctions between different kinds of *familias*, which my questions made interviewees differentiate to me. In this way, I did push some categories, or at least I was telling them to give them a name. They, then, divided the categories of *familia* into three. Since some categories are equivalent, though might have been called slightly different, I called them *familia primaria*, *familia cercana*, and *familia lejana*. They, indeed, understood what I was referring to as we made them together.

The interviews were made by videoconferences, using Skype, and were recorded with Call Graph into MP3 format. As was mentioned, I had some questions ready that I followed but also changed or omitted according to the conversation. Interviews lasted from forty to seventy minutes each, and they were all done in Spanish. Although I am only choosing to translate what I considered important (bias) and since Spanish and English are linguistically related, many terms such as *papa* or *padre* (father), *hermano* (brother), *primo(a)* (cousin), *lazo afectivo* (emotional bond), have been translated directly without trying to find the local meaning. My experience of living in both Colombian and American cultures, has allowed me to recognize that many of these terms, though not all, are indeed equivalent. Finally, the relational terms in this paper refer to biological ties as they were discussed by the interviewees. This is necessary to take into account as I argue that these ties are essential but there is also another concept of emotional bond that plays an important part in defining *familia*.

Consanguinity and Emotional Bonds: defining the *familia*

As was already mentioned, the term *familia* was during the interviews an ambiguous and polysemic concept, meaning that I constantly had to figure out according to the context or by asking for explanations of who belonged to the *familia*. The meaning of *familia* for my interviewees was defined by the qualities that people possessed. As Julián says, *familia* are the people closest to one; they are people in whom one has enough trust to rely on for life. For Carlos, *familia* is the primary connection that is held together by love, understanding, and a common goal. *Familia* starts, as Alvaro says, by the union of a couple, and just as he was told in high school, *familia* is the main unit from which society is formed.

Because of its polysemic qualities, the answers that I recorded referring to who belongs to *familia* certainly depended on how the questions were asked. The reason is that *familia* for my interviewees was anything from the people who lived together in the same household to supportive neighbors, pets, domestic workers, or anybody who shared consanguinity. Of course, some of these may be mutually exclusive. This can be explained by creating a difference between what I have called consanguine (genetic or biological) relations and emotional bonds. As in many “Western” societies, the interviewees recognized that there is some common substance that is shared among people who come from the same relative or who are related by a marital union and/or its reproductive processes. *Familia*, then, in the biological and broadest sense was everybody who shares this connection, no matter where they lived or how close they were to each other. Exemplifying what all interviewees told me about being family, Alvaro says,

I think that the *familia*, no matter how good or bad, or little or lots of relationships with one they may have, they are still *familia*.... There are no reasons to say that someone is not of the *familia*, if they are one. The only way I consider someone to not be part of my *familia*, is that that person is not a *pariente* [blood related].

Accordingly, when a few days later I asked my interviewees to write down the names of the members of their *familia*, they included everybody with whom they are related by consanguinity or by marriage (including the spouse’s consanguine relatives)¹. In this case and context, *familia* refers to everybody. The only people who are not related by consanguinity are the spouses (if any) and the spouses’ consanguine relatives. These people, instead, are related by emotional bonds (as it will be explained in further detail later on). As

Carlos states,

The *familia* is unified through the roots, which are direct. Or it is indirect if she is a sister-in-law, for example.... If we were talking about the *familia*, it is people from my branch, and the branch of my spouse.... If there is enmity between that *familia* that we are talking about, if I fight with an aunt, an aunt of my spouse, well, I will not talk to her again. But she keeps being *familia* of hers, and indirectly is part of the *familia*. I cannot deny that she is part of the great group that we call *familia*.

Lastly, when I inquired about people who were part of the *familia*, but who were not related biologically to them, everybody, except Julián, said that there existed at least someone fulfilling this criterion. In the case of Alvaro, it was the maid, bodyguard, or whoever spent enough time working with them. In the case of Andrea, her neighbors and her dogs were part of her *familia*. And for Carlos, an anonymous person whom he is not interested in introducing to anybody, but to whom he has been helping economically (fulfilling a role). Although these relationships will be discussed in more detail later on, it is sufficient to make the point that all interviewees said that these relationships were *como* (like) *familia*; indeed, they were not *familia* but rather momentary or circumstantial beings that because of emotional bonds, they were so close to be considered like *familia*².

This brings us to the idea of emotional bonds. Unlike consanguinity, which is a fixed attribute linking people to a *familia*, what I have called emotional bonds are a more complex set of relationships that are created and influenced by many factors, but that, most importantly, are mutable. Emotional bonds, thus, are the reason why people can become like *familia*, or why some people may be considered *familia cercana* or *familia lejana*. The most important factor in creating or nourishing an emotional bond (or *lazo afectivo* as Julián called it) is through personal interaction. Interaction, as a key factor, is useful because it includes all the reasons why someone is *familia* or what the degree of closeness is in relation to the speaker. Interaction involves an investment of time and physical presence (even through new technological devices, such as Skype). Because of this investment of time, interest (which is very important for Andrea) is demonstrated. Through frequent communication, trust may develop, which according to all interviewees, is a necessary characteristic of anybody who will be considered like *familia* or *familia cercana*. Alvaro says that as trust develops, the relationship becomes more intense and closer. Andrea, while discussing the differences of *familia* with non-*familia*, concurs adding, "It is totally different. One has much more trust [with the *familia*]. With other people, one has no trust and everything. But with the *familia*, it is always trust and you know they are not going to hurt you."

Through interaction and the developing of trust, which is aided by locality, mutual chemistry, and personality, the emotional bonds are progressively created. The more interaction and affinity there is, the greater the emotional bond. Thus, some people become closer to others, and this varies in degrees proportional to the strength of the emotional bond. From here, people who are considered *familia cercana* or *familia lejana* are derived. If communication stops or the trust is challenged, the degree of closeness may decrease or even be totally disrupted. This is a state that may change, a state which is mutable. Interaction and the degree of emotional bonds are the reasons why, for Andrea, her *familia primaria* includes right now (implying the possibility of change) her mom, sons,

sister, and uncle (the people living with her at home).³ She adds, moreover, that she has another *familia*, which is not there with her right now (most of them are in Colombia). For Andrea, “*Familia cercana* see and talk to each other every day. The bad thing is that *familia lejana* see each other once in a while and there is not as much communication.... So this depends on when one sees each other.... When I see them and I can catch-up with them, there is trust again.” It is important to stress the relationship between consanguinity and emotional bond, since indeed most, though not all people with whom someone has an emotional bond, are also *familia*. One reason is that in current Colombia, marriages are neolocal under most circumstances. A couple starts a new *familia* in which they will live in a new home with their offspring (usually consanguine). As the offspring grow up, as it is in the case of my *familia*, they move out of the house to go to college or when they marry someone. Otherwise, it is very likely that the person stays home, as is the case of my uncle Augusto Botero. When people move out, the emotional and legal bonds among *familia*, of which I will explore later, usually stay strong. As the *familia* grows bigger, there are some ties that are kept strong, maintaining and holding all those consanguine relationships together, although some may still be considered *familia lejana*. Moreover, as Julián says,

For a group that can be considered *familia*, besides having a genetic bond, there is the need of an emotional bond.... For me, the emotional bond is indispensable. Without emotional bond, for me there would be no *familia*. But if there is genetic bond, well, it is an important addition.... It is because genetics transmits the personality, way of being, physical resemblance, so that bond emphasis and provides better grounding for an emotional bond. So with both bonds, I think that for probability, there could be an even stronger bond.

However, although consanguinity may provide, in most cases, the grounding for an emotional bond and although consanguine *familia* will always be *familia*, the emotional bond seems to be more important and essential for defining the degree of closeness among *familia* members (and even more critical for *familia primaria*) especially when it is linked to the fulfillment of an expected social or family role. Moreover, as Julián and Carlos asserted, although there have been no cases in my *familia* of adoption or step-parenthood, these relationships could also make someone become part of the family. For Julián,

If a father, for example, does not respond for the kid, he disappears or something, or if he has had no contact with the kid in his whole life, well, he may be *familia* for genetics, but for me, he would not be *familia* because there is no emotional bond.... There is really no need for a genetic bond because in many times it is possible that one’s mom or dad is not the genetic parent, but the one who fulfills the role of mom or dad. Or it is like having a brother that is not really brother [genetically] but friends. But they might have lived in one’s house or home and so one considers them like brothers.

Apart from showing the importance of fulfilling the social role for being or becoming part of a family, Julián’s statement also expresses the importance of the emotional bond. He also points out how critical the expected role is that may be fulfilled by someone who does not have to be genetically related. As it is seen in the case of Andrea, although she

considers her Swiss paternal side genetically *familia*, she says they are “as if they weren’t *familia*,” because they never talk to each other. “They are *familia*, but not,” Andrea says. On the other hand, Andrea considers her “*now*” neighbors, as being “like part of the *familia*.” They grew up together, they support, look for, and help each other and their dad is, for Andrea, *like* a father (Andrea’s father is already dead). In Andrea’s case, her neighbors are currently like *familia* because of the developed emotional bond and because of Andrea’s imaginary expected role of what a *familia* should be. This role is partially fulfilled by her neighbors.

Analyzing the apparent dichotomy of, for example, being a father genetically or becoming a father through the development of an emotional bond and the fulfillment of the paternal role, is more complex than it seems. First of all, if there is the fulfillment of both criteria, most likely, it would be normative. However, if one of these is missing, conflict might arise because the imaginary ideal of a father is not normatively fulfilled. The contextual history of the individual and the positionality will greatly influence the way that the individual will perceive the “other” as a father, or like a father, or what the actual outcome would be. The strength of the emotional bond, for how highly it has been talked about by the interviewees, may be of great importance in this case. Following Schneider’s critique of kinship studies and the assumption that “Blood Is Thicker Than Water,” the examination of my *familia* provides evidence of how the consanguine bond, although it is fixed, really is not the most important bond between members. These states of being with which a person is born does not guarantee the relationship and are not necessarily followed by actual fulfilling of the role (Schneider 1984: 165-6). Rather, for my *familia*, performing a role and creating an emotional bond seems more indispensable for developing a relationship and for determining the degree of closeness that exists. This closeness, therefore, does not necessarily follow a consanguine bond. It is, finally, important to know that this dyadic separation of being a father or becoming a father (or any other member of the *familia*), may be nonexistent. It might be the case that these are not really separated but, instead, a father *is* and *becomes* a father through time. The consanguine and emotional bond separation, although may be complementary, seem to also be part of the same relationship existent between members of the *familia*.

Home: the catalyst for the cementation of the *familia*

As was already mentioned, the term *familia* is exchangeable since it can be used in different contexts and for describing different groups of people. However, when I asked my interviewees what *familia* was, their first answer referred to what I have determined the *familia primaria*, as Julián called it. This *familia primaria*, which according to Alvaro starts with a marriage, undoubtedly is the most important kind of *familia*. Because of this nature, the original *familia primaria* is disrupted after marriage as it may shift one’s responsibilities from son or daughter to spouse and possibly parent. With this new marital bond, moreover, a new set of people is added to the *familia* of each spouse. The conjunct of these two will be the *familia* of the new *familia primaria*’s offspring.

If locality, which allows interaction, is so important for developing emotional bonds, living together and sharing the quotidian life seems to be the ultimate catalyst for facilitating the development of the *familia primaria*. Home, as it was told directly or indirectly by my interviewees, is the most important social and cultural space that provides opportunity

for interaction and which is intrinsically linked to the *familia primaria*. Julián has to say about *familia primaria* and home,

For me, what *familia [primaria]* really is, is the people who grew up together. I mean, people who are in one's home. The ones with whom one had relationships at home.... [Other relatives], instead, are secondary because they are not in one's home and one can see that as one grows up, the relationships with cousins, uncles, starts to degenerate. However, with the people from home, well, most likely one still will have to keep in contact with them... so for me, it is us five: dad, mom, Alejandro [our brother] and you [Esteban].

Familia primaria cannot really exist without a home. As a new marriage is formed, they are expected to get a new house because a new *familia primaria* is born. As Julián said, the bonds, emotional bonds, which are developed at home, are much stronger than any other bond. These are expected to last for a long time and to be resistant to distance: though I presume, having no proof, that if interaction becomes nonexistent the emotional bond will deteriorate greatly. Another importance of the kind of bond developed at home, which is emotional, loving, caring, and allows freedom in some ways, is that which involves the highest level of obligation, as Julián said. The strength of this bond can be seen in the example of Paulina and Lorena, Alvaro's daughters, who are currently living in Europe. Alvaro asserts that because of the benefits provided by new communication technologies and the fact that they are his daughters, the intensity of the relationships stays strong. This strong relationship, I believe, works as positive feedback, since the stronger the emotional bond, the more likely it will be that they keep in touch, even if they are no longer in the same place; and the more they communicate and keep in touch, the stronger the relationship will become.

Interviewees were eager to remark the importance of quotidian life in cementing those emotional bonds. Andrea talked about the importance of eating together everyday as being a normal practice of the *familia primaria*. Alvaro added to this by talking about sharing basic needs like eating, sleeping, and expressing feelings like crying, laughing, and getting angry. For Alvaro, the sharing of places, chores, normal activities, and physical contact was very important and unique to the *familia primaria*. Sharing of memories and a common goal is crucial for Carlos, while the sharing of common education and experiences was essential for Julián to recognize a *familia primaria*. This view of *familia primaria* and its relationship to home (which allows interaction and sharing) is theorized by Bourdieu as Janet Carsten explains. According to Carsten, the house brings together people in a space, and through meaningful everyday living activities, such as cooking, eating meals, and sharing resources, intimate relationships are formed. Moreover, through this process, the kinds of relationships and expected behavior among different members are shaped, as well as what it means to be a member of the group and a way to be identified as such. For Carsten, living together and sharing activities creates kinship, which in this case I have called *familia* (2004: 49, 55). This view, indeed, seems an appropriate way to understand the importance and function of the home and what goes on in it.

Aided by the development of emotional bonds, the sharing of the quotidian life and home space may also explain why, for Alvaro, the domestic workers and bodyguards may be considered "like" part of the *familia*. Moreover, these people work and contribute to achieve the marital and *familia primaria* goal, which is one of the meanings of *familia*, or *familia*

primaria. Alvaro says,

The *familia* are... the people who live with them [the marital union]. Also others may be part of the *familia*, like people who work in the conjugal society or people that because of their connection to that couple may live together, like the mother, or an aunt, or a grandmother. And also the people who work in the house like the lady from the kitchen, the driver, the bodyguard are part of that *familia*, although being in minor affinity terms.

There are of course some other rules that make people belong to the *familia primaria* or just *familia* in general. These are talked about in the next section.

Familia primaria, familia cercana, and familia lejana: practical differences

Living together at home, then, seems to separate the *familia primaria* from the other kinds of *familia* which are not as close. The sharing of quotidian life cements and blends together their emotional and consanguine (if any) bonds as people fulfill their expected roles in the *familia*. Members of this group seem to be, ideally, a married couple with their sons; perhaps, because of the socioeconomic status of the people I interviewed, a maid or some kind of domestic worker may be marginally included. However, because of different reasons such as going abroad to college, divorces, or death, this may not be the case. Although *familia* (no matter the kind) may be a continuum, *familia primaria* seems to be a little more distinguishable from *familia cercana* and *familia lejana*. However, their difference may be just a matter of degree of the emotional bond developed instead of being clear cut categories.

One very important criterion that separates the *familia primaria* from both *familia cercana* and *lejana* is the level of responsibilities and obligation that they have. Julián, for example, says that he feels obligated and ready to do anything for someone who is part of the *familia primaria*. Even though he might not want to or it might seem hard, he does feel a greater weight or burden to accomplish what one is supposed to do. Julián's responsibilities, as he says, are to be always available. However, comparing this sense of obligation to the one towards the rest of the *familia*, Julián says, "no, not as much. With the secondary *familia* [not *familia primaria*], instead, one does what one can do, but there is not as much primary responsibility. One gets very unobligated towards them.... There is no responsibility to respond for them." Julián, being part of a *familia primaria* feels that he needs to be the fruit of the family and demonstrate the respect he has for his parents. Accordingly, he feels the obligation to help his *familia primaria* learn things that they could not do by themselves and to help achieve their common goals.

For Carlos and Andrea, being part of a *familia primaria* means one hundred- percent commitment. Andrea confided in me that she does everything for her sons. Because they are little and depend totally on her, she aims to stay well, healthy, and sound, not as much for herself, but for being able to be the support for her kids. For Carlos, too, the *familia primaria* is the main responsibility. There is also a legal component in this membership. For Carlos, what belongs to the *familia primaria* has nothing to do with the other *familia*, and they have absolutely no right over anything. He feels, similar to Alvaro, that he must provide with food, clothing, education, and well- being to his *familia*. He does not expect anybody else to

do this (although help will also come from the spouse), since he is not obligated to provide for the rest of the *familia* which is not *primaria*. If he helps other *familia*, it is just because of the strength of the emotional bonds and the way he was educated, Carlos says. The emotional and economic support are characteristic features of the *familia primaria*. As all interviewees told me, people who are outside the *familia primaria*, are considered “other,” and although there might be affinity, their individual relationship and level of obligation is directly proportional to the degree of emotional bond.

As it was already mentioned, *familia cercana* and *familia lejana* are secondary *familia* and comprise a different group to the *familia primaria*. The levels of responsibility among people who are not *familia primaria* are much less marked and obligatory. This separation is seen in Julián’s statement that *familia cercana* or *familia lejana* are still strangers to him, compared to *familia primaria*. Although they may be close, for Julián, they will never be like the *familia* from home. Although for all interviewees the degree of emotional bond was the most important criteria for someone to be *familia cercana* or *familia lejana*, their answers differed somewhat when I asked what *familia cercana* or *familia lejana* were and when I asked them to write down who their members were. Julián and Andrea followed closely what they told me in the interview regarding to the members of *familia cercana* or *familia lejana*. For them, *familia primaria* was the people who live with them, while *familia cercana* or *familia lejana* depended on the degree of the emotional bond that evolved because of interaction and chemistry.

On the other hand, Alvaro and Carlos gave me answers that differed greatly. For example, Carlos included in the list for *familia primaria*, after having emphasized so much the closeness and different kind of bond to his current *familia primaria* (my brothers, mom, and me), his siblings, which he told me during the interview are now *familia cercana*. Following the closeness of consanguine bonds, he even included in the list of *familia cercana* people who he has barely seen in his life. Similar to Carlos, Alvaro also placed emphasis in those consanguine bonds. For Alvaro, the degree of closeness went from offspring and wife as being *familia primaria*, to siblings and siblings-in-law and their offspring as *familia cercana*, and his second and third cousins as *familia lejana*.

I find three possible explanations for this situation. One is that the ways in which I asked the question in both occasions were different, so people understood the questions differently. Implied in this is the fact that some people talked about the three different kinds of *familia*, but never really explicitly gave a name to all of them. The second explanation is that consanguine bonds are more important than emotional bonds, but this would contradict most of what interviewees told me during the spoken interviews. The last, and I think most plausible explanation, is that it is a matter of subjectivity aided by personal history and positionality in the family. Julián and Andrea are in their twenties and thirties respectively, they haven’t lost many members of the *familia*, and neither of them is currently married. Because of this, their bonds are still strong to their parents and siblings and their emotional bonds haven’t really extended to other branches of *familia* through marriage⁴. Alvaro and Carlos, contrastingly, are still married and are much older. They are the heads of *familias primarias* in which no offspring has married. Moreover, their parents (my grandparents) are all dead and so are most of their aunts and uncles. Since as I was told by interviewees that dead members of the *familia* are really no longer *familia* by any means besides experiences, teachings, and memories, they

cannot trace *familia* bonds with any of the people who are in older “generations” and to which their relationships may be more based on the degree of emotional bonds. Carlos and Alvaro seem only to be able to trace *familia* to their siblings and siblings-in-law and their offspring. Of course siblings and siblings-in-law are very important relationships because they are based on a *familia primaria* bonds, and that is why relationships with cousins and beyond consanguine relationships, which have faded away with time, are considered *familia lejana*.

Although *familia* members may never stop being *familia* because of their consanguine ties, there are ways and cases that make people more marginal. Javier Ferrero is one of these cases. As I was told by Julián, Andrea, and especially Carlos, Javier seems to be the sibling that people have the least contact with and so he is the least close *familia*. According to Carlos’s explanation, Javier’s friendships and his decision of not going to college to do jobs like driving a bus and constructing houses alienated him from the *familia*. Although Javier is a brother and the fact that Carlos would be ready to help him whenever he needs to, the difference in social class kept Javier marginal. The social class also influenced the locality and the level of interaction between Javier and the rest of the *familia*, deteriorating the bonds that he had with his siblings and certainly avoiding any emotional bond that could have been developed with any other members of the *familia*. This lack of emotional bond makes Julián and Andrea believe that there is virtually no responsibility or obligation toward Javier. This example tells us that, besides consanguinity and location, other factors such as social class and life choices may influence greatly the degree of emotional bond and the definition of *familia*.

The only way that people may cease to be part of the *familia* is through divorce, according to my interviewees. This is the case for all except Alvaro who believes they become *familia lejana*. They say that the relationship that is left after divorce depends on the emotional bond rather than any other criteria. However, this depends on the perspective since for an offspring, although his parents may be divorced, his father will still be part of his *familia*, even though his parents are not longer *familia*. From the ex-spouse’s perspective, according to Carlos, the relationship after divorce could be of friendship or total avoidance. Dead members of the *familia*, as well as people who are genetically far from the “ego” (usually beyond second cousins), also lose their membership of the *familia*. In the case of Andrea, Alvaro, and Carlos who have lost at least one of their parents, those dead members keep being *familia* but only in their memories, their love, and their teachings. However, according to them, for all practical purposes they are no longer part of the *familia*. It is important to keep in mind, that there has not been an event where someone has been dishonored or has turned his/her back against anybody else. Therefore, the answers I got might not tell me the whole range of possibilities as to how to lose membership in the *familia*.

As it is expected, the behavior differs with people who are considered *familia* compared to others who are not *familia*. This distinction is important because emotional bonds can also be developed with people who are friends but not *familia*. Moreover, the created identity of belonging to a *familia* affects that behavior and the relationships with other people. My interviewees talked to me about it in terms of trust and emotional bonds. When someone is *familia* to Andrea, she thinks that she can trust that person is not going to hurt her. People who are not *familia* are to be distrusted because one does not really know them. For Alvaro, the lack of this trust with people who are not *familia* make him treat them superficially, and for

Julián, he feels like he has to act more in accord with the social norms in order to show a good impression of who he is; Julián says that he does not feel as free when he is with people who are not *familia*.

Positionality and Context: important differences

With this section I want to point out one last concept, which along with the context I talked about in the second section of this paper, I believe is important in order to understand the differences in people's accounts. The concept of growing old, and its inherent shift of positionality it that brings, may explain some of the member's complex perspectives. There is, for example, a difference between being an offspring of a *familia primaria*, possibly not yet married, and a father. Because of the greater social and economic responsibilities that the parent has toward the rest of the *familia*, parents understand *familia* as being united to achieve a common goal. *Familia* is seen as a conjugal society that works towards educating and raising the kids so they become successful. On the other hand, offspring who yet do not have those kinds of responsibilities see *familia* as being united by mostly trust, respect, love, and the emotional bond.

As those offspring grow older and marry creating a new *familia primaria*, the definition and the members of that *familia primaria* change as well because new responsibilities and relationships have been formed. People who were *familia primaria*, like brothers, will likely become *familia cercana*. After this, the nourishing of the emotional bond becomes more important since they are no longer living together. Added to this is the example from the last section regarding the difference between Alvaro and Carlos's views of *familia cercana* and *familia lejana*, compared to Julián and Andrea's perspectives.

Concluding Remarks

Although the interviewees' accounts may differ in some respects, there are some important similarities and core symbols that allow these people to identify themselves as being part of a *familia*. The symbols, in this case, are consanguinity and emotional bonds, which are interwoven and complement each other to define the boundaries of the concept of *familia*. These symbols are also aided by the sharing of a quotidian life, the fulfillment of social roles, and living in the same home. People's positionality and individual histories have made them interpret and talk about these symbols in slightly different ways creating, thus, some more marginal accounts that have helped me define the boundaries of what *familia* is.

This analysis of a Colombian *familia* shows the importance of being careful when using the idea of kinship, even in "Western" countries and locations. Although consanguinity is an important symbol, it has been shown that it is neither necessary nor deterministic in defining *familia* or the relationships among its members. There are many ways in which an individual creates an identity and *familia*. At least for my interviewees, this identity is definitely a primordial one, since *familia* is the support and main bond created with others and the most important set of social relations for them. Moreover, their identity becomes tied to a set of people that work together to achieve a common goal and that aim to create offspring who can become successful (in their own way) in their societies. *Familia*, which in this case is positioned in a mostly upper-middle class, liberal, Catholic, educated Colombian *familia*, provides important insights to analyze the ways in which its members, core or marginal,

behave, see the world, and interact in the larger society and public sphere.

¹ With the exception of Andrea Dasen who included her dogs in her list, but I believe it was because of a personal joke that we had during our conversation.

² It is important to point out that there are no cases of adoption by any members of my *familia*.

³ Andrea is divorced. Moreover, her uncle, Jose Alberto, spends a lot of time and lives sometimes with them, but he has his own house somewhere else close to Quito. That is why he is considered, for Andrea, as part of the *familia directa* but also just *familia cercana*.

⁴ Although Andrea has been married and has two sons, her *familia* networks haven't really extended to her ex-husband *familia* because of the bad relationships that they have had. For Andrea, indeed, not even her ex-husband is *familia*.

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