U.S. AMERICAN – MEXICAN INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT:

A STUDY OF MIXED COUPLES IN GUADALAJARA, MÉXICO

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of

Master of Arts, Communication

The University of New Mexico

Albuquerque, New Mexico

August, 2004

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Nancy Jean Rinderle – my sister, my Family, my best friend.

Without you, I would not have made it this far.

Without you, I would not have made it at all.

Without you, at times there would have been little reason to keep trying.

Understanding, Appreciation, Belonging.

Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Antes que nada, quiero agradecer a todas las personas que me abrieron sus hogares y sus corazones, y me permitieron entrar a sus vidas através de esta investigación. Sin su confianza y buena voluntad, este proyecto no hubiera existido. Estoy sumamente agradecida por su papel en mi desarrollo profesional y académico, y me siento privilegiada haberlos conocido a cada uno de Uds. Espero que mi labor haya sido provechoso para todos Uds., y que esta tésis sea de utilidad para Uds., para poder continuar sus vidas y sus relaciones con mayor felicidad y crecimiento personal.

A special thanks to all my participants for opening your homes and hearts to me, and for allowing me to enter your lives through this research. Without your trust and good faith, this project would not have happened. I am very grateful for your role in my professional and academic development, and I feel privileged for having met each one of you. I hope my efforts here are beneficial to you, and that this thesis is useful in helping you continue your lives and relationships with maximum happiness and personal growth.

In particular, thank you to la familia Cruz Evans – Juliet, Eddie, Matthew, and baby Andrew – for your kindness, generosity, and hospitality. Juliet, during one of the worst crises of my life, you reminded me what true friends are willing to do for each other, despite distance in time and space. This project would not have happened at all without your energy, initiative, good cheer, and people skills. Thank you so much! Eddie, también un agradecimiento especial para ti por ser tan bondadoso y generoso conmigo, ¡y sobre todo durante una etapa muy importante para ti como esposo y papá! Gracias por ser tan atento y paciente conmigo.

Quiero agradecer también el apoyo del Dr. Mauricio Alcocer Ruthling, de la Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara, por siempre ser tan amable conmigo y conseguirme acceso a la biblioteca UAG. Gracias también al Dr. Enrique Sánchez Ruíz de la Universidad de Guadalajara y al Dr. Raúl Fuentes Navarro del ITESO por su tiempo, apoyo y amabilidad.

I want to also thank Dr. Mauricio Alcocer Ruthling of the Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara for your support, for always being so kind, and for getting me access to the UAG library. Thank you also to Dr. Enrique Sánchez Ruíz of the Universidad de Guadalajara and Dr. Raúl Fuentes Navarro of the ITESO for your time, support, and friendly consideration.

Thanks also to Elaine Muñoz for being so interested in my project, and so responsive and instrumental in helping me recruit participants and provide me with contacts. Gracias also to all the other gringas in Guadalajara that were not part of the study, but eagerly awaited study results and cheered me on!

I especially want to thank John Oetzel for meeting or surpassing all my hopes and expectations as a committee chair and mentor. I appreciate so much your interest in me and my work, your helpful insights, your responsiveness, and your thoroughness. You have been truly generous with yourself and your time. You provided the structure I desperately needed and yet encouraged me to find my own voice and vision. Thank you for showing acceptance of the gamut of emotion I expressed in the last two years, and for your vital role in this major life accomplishment.

Thank you also to Krishna Kandath and Nancy López for providing your invaluable feedback and insights on this project. You helped keep me grounded in what I

believe research and learning should be about – increasing justice, and improving life for as many people as possible. Krishna, thank you also for being an intellectual role model, supportive of my work, and understanding of my limitations. There are few people that can make me laugh *and* think as hard as you do!

A special thank you to all the Pirate Women of C&J. Never in my life until this past year have I felt I could not do something alone. Thank you for teaching me that if I can't do it alone, I won't be left alone. Thank you for reminding me that some of the noblest deeds require an act of piracy to accomplish. Argh!!

I want to thank the generosity of the Communication & Journalism Budget Committee and the UNM Office of Graduate Studies for providing funding to make this research possible.

Thanks also to my mother, Jane Huber Rinderle, and my grandmother, Jane Scudder Huber, for leaving me a legacy that made attending graduate school possible. I am the first woman in my families to realize such an accomplishment, in large part because of you. Indeed, I know I stand on the shoulders of all the Janes and the grandmothers that went before.

Also, thank you to Memo for always being there, even when no one else seemed to be, and always knowing what to do.

Gracias también a México – lindo y querido – y a todos los mexicanos que me han hecho enamorar de su país, su cultura y su manera de ser.

Thank you also to "beautiful, loved" México and to all the mexicanos *that have made me fall in love with your country, your culture, and your way of being.*

Finally, Ahnce, thank you once again – for everything. I love you!

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ABSTRACT

It was my purpose to undertake a study that would begin to close a gap in intercultural communication research on conflict between Mexicans and U.S. Americans. I examined the ways Mexican and U.S. American marital partners perceive and describe how they manage interpersonal conflict with each other. I organized my research questions around a model of conflict antecedents, behaviors, and consequences that emerged from a review of both romantic relational conflict research and cross-cultural and intercultural conflict research, and applied a critical and postcolonial theoretical lens.

I conducted in-depth interviews of eight heterosexual married couples residing in Guadalajara, Mexico. Using the grounded theory method, I identified seven conflict antecedent themes (atypicality, normalcy, external stressors, antecedent communication behaviors, culture, power and authority, and similar values), four conflict behavior themes (emotions, direct/indirect communication styles, conflict management strategies,

and post-conflict behavior), and four consequence themes (positive identity, attribution to individual differences, recognition of culture differences, and marital satisfaction). I synthesize and interpret these results by describing six major findings. I relate study results to existing research, offer four theoretical implications and four practical implications. I cover study limitations, offer suggestions for future research, and conclude with some final personal reflections.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Latinos[1], and more specifically Mexicans[2] and Mexican Americans[3], have long

been a significant feature of the American continent – its demographics, social

geography, and history. For the last 156 years, since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,

this significance has generally been less recognized or obvious inside the current

boundaries of the United States than outside, with the exception of regions such as

California, Texas, the Southwest, and the borderlands. However, due to recent trends, the

presence of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States and their influence on

U.S. culture is becoming more prevalent and more of a crucial issue for the U.S. and its

mainstream citizens. This cultural intersection brims with positive potential for all the

individuals, groups, nations, cultures and economies involved, yet is frequently a

battleground for opposing political and economic interests, and a stage where U.S.

American fears are played out (Gutiérrez, 1996) and U.S. American identities are

contested. The most recent act in this drama was over an article published by Harvard

scholar Samuel Huntington (2004) claiming that Mexican and Latin American

immigrants threaten the U.S. American identity and way of life, and the ensuing furor in

the media, academia, and community and political organizations.

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[1] A "Latino" is a person residing in the U.S. of Latin American national origin or descent, regardless of race, language or culture.

[2] A "Mexican" is a Mexican national; a person born in Mexico, or of Mexican nationality, regardless of race or ethnicity, and who identifies as such.

[3] A "Mexican American" is a U.S. American of Mexican descent, born and residing within the current national borders of the United States. While there are many different terms for this diasporic population (e.g. Chicano, Hispanic, *mexicano*), each of which has different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and political connotations, I use "Mexican American" throughout this thesis. See p. 12 for further discussion on this issue.

Latinos, especially Mexicans, have long been a significant feature of my personal socialscape as well. I was born and raised in the greater Los Angeles area in the 1970s and 1980s, and was bussed to public schools where my teachers were mostly of color, and the student population reflected both the diversity of a major urban center, and the continually changing makeup of domestic and global society. My friends and classmates were poor and middle class. They were African American, Anglo (White), Armenian, Iranian, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Pilipino, and Mexican. When I was 12, I started learning Spanish in the classroom and in the streets, becoming proficient by the time I was 16. I visited Mexico for the first time when I was 16, and was profoundly and positively affected by the people I met, and by all I saw, heard, felt, and tasted. Later, during my undergraduate years studying sociology at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), I spent several months in Mexico City conducting field research and studying at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), one of the most respected universities in Mexico and Latin America. In a sense, I never came back.

Since 1990, my life has been bilingual and bicultural. I have traveled back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico every year, even returning to live in Mexico in 1997. In myriad settings on both sides of the border, Mexicans, Latin Americans and Latinos have long been my friends, lovers, coworkers, colleagues, *comadres* ["co-mothers"; close friends]*, ahijadas* [god daughters], supervisors, subordinates, mentors, mentees, neighbors, and clients. I have observed and experienced firsthand the promises and perils of communication between individuals from the United States and Mexico; an intercultural communication rife with vastly different understandings of the heart, the mind, the soul, and the history of the continent. I believe that, in a world wrought with

misunderstanding and abuses of power, communication is one of the most important tools human beings have at their disposal in creating the most fulfilling, equitable relationships possible. I hope to assist people from these two worlds – from these two neighboring nations – to better understand one another, and communicate together more effectively in finding ways we can co-exist in this space we co-inhabit. I also hope to gain some personal insight into conflict I have experienced in my own failed intercultural relationships, and my dysfunctional family of origin.

Aside from my personal interest and investment in this topic, further study on the interpersonal dynamics between Mexicans and U.S. Americans is crucial to the success of these relationships for seven reasons. First, demographic trends are making Latinos, especially Mexicans and people of Mexican descent, a more prominent feature of the U.S. social landscape. According to 2000 Census returns, at 13% of the total population, Latinos are now the largest "minority" ethnic group in the United States – 10 years ahead of schedule. The 20.6 million people of Mexican descent living in the U.S. comprise a majority of the nation's Latinos at 58%, and constitute one-third of the inhabitants of the nation's most populous state: California (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).[4]

Second, in terms of economics, the buying power of the U.S. Latino population, which includes immigrants from Mexico and other countries, is projected to reach $1 trillion by 2010; more than double its current figure (McCollum, 2001). Also, the Mexican and U.S. economies are more inextricably linked. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), or *Tratado de Libre Comercio* (TLC,) signed by the U.S. in 1994 with Mexico and Canada, has had tremendous impact on trade, employment, labor,

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[4] It is important to note that the designations "Hispanic" and "Latino" in the U.S. Census were *ethnic*, not racial categories, and a person could self-identify as either, and be of any race. See p. 11 for more on the difference between race and ethnicity.

and the economies of both the U.S. and Mexico. Even before NAFTA, citizens of the U.S. and Mexico have spent billions of dollars per year in each other's countries. In 2003, immigrant Mexican workers in the U.S. sent home $13 billion to family members in Mexico, which was the second largest source of income for the Mexican economy after oil exports ("Emigrants Provide," 2004), and 18% of all adults in Mexico received remittances (Pew Hispanic Center, 2003).

Third, Mexico and the U.S. are becoming more mutually politically influential. At 2,000 miles, the border between the U.S. and Mexico is one of the longest in the world, one of the most frequently crossed, and arguably the most dramatic divider between two of the most economically disparate nations in the world (Condon, 1985; Espinosa, 1999). More immigrants come to the U.S. from Mexico than any other country, and in 1998 constituted the largest group of immigrants in 27 states (America 2000: A Map of the Mix, 2000). In 1996, Mexico legalized dual U.S.-Mexican citizenship and there are now approximately 20 million dual citizens (Texan in Mexico, 2001). In fact, three dual nationals ran for mayor in three separate towns in the Mexican state of Zacatecas during the summer of 2001 (Mena, 2001). Mexican presidential candidate Vicente Fox campaigned in California in 1999 and 2000, and several community organizations held pseudo-voting in that state. Fox won the presidency in both Mexico and California, and proceeded to implement the now-defunct cabinet-level Presidential Office for Mexicans in the Exterior – headed by *Texas-born* Juan Hernández.

Fourth, despite the increasing demographic, economic and political power of Mexicans, both inside and outside the current borders of the United States, little research has been conducted in the communication discipline on intercultural intersections

between U.S. Americans and Mexicans. Studies that do examine this intersection, comment on the need for more research (Delgado, 1981; Hecht & Ribeau, 1984; Hecht, Ribeau, & Sedano, 1990; Markus & Lin, 1999). In a database search of *Communication Abstracts* conducted in September 2003, I found only one article that looks specifically at Latinos (and not Mexicans) in intercultural communication within interpersonal relationships (Johnson, Lindsley, & Zakahi, 2002).

Communication research is also lagging behind recent trends. Of a total 28 studies I identified in the communication field that were at all relevant to Mexican, Latino, or Mexican American interpersonal communication, about one-third were from the 1980s, and more than half were conducted in the 1990s. Of the studies conducted in the 1990s, the majority were published during or before 1994, the year NAFTA was passed. Five were directly involved in a lively debate that took place on the pages of the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* during 1990, 1993 and 1994, primarily over matters of identity labels and their implications, "proper" triangulation of research methods, and the nature of insider versus outsider research approaches.[5]

Fifth, current research on intersections between Mexicans and U.S. Americans, or U.S. Anglos and Mexican Americans, tends toward cross-cultural comparisons or studies of *intracultural* communication or conflict. In other words, many examine behaviors, values, and expectations that individuals have in interacting with members of their *own* culture, or compare cultural differences *between* cultures, but do not look at how communication behaviors, values, and expectations may differ or change *during* *interaction* with people who are culturally different. While cultural and cross-cultural

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[5] See the following: Delgado (1994); Hecht et al. (1990); Hecht, Sedano & Ribeau (1993); Mirandé & Tanno (1993a); Mirandé & Tanno (1993b).

work may inform us about a person's, or a group's, conflict orientation, it tells little about what happens when a particular person or group interacts with another (Adler & Graham, 1989).

Sixth, "some of the most severe problems in intercultural relations arise as a consequence of interpersonal conflicts" (Gabrielidis, Stephan, Ybarra, Dos Santos Pearson, & Villareal, 1997, p. 661). Interpersonal conflicts may also manifest or represent a microcosm of larger macro-conflicts or structural issues that, in turn, affect individuals, and the groups, nations and cultures they comprise. Indeed, interpersonal conflicts are a way in which many people experience and enact larger social conflict or inequalities (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). Conflicts specifically between intimate relational partners such as spouses may illuminate the intercultural dynamic in unique ways that conflicts between strangers and acquaintances do not. Intimate partners tend to be more invested in the relationship, have more frequent contact, and experience more intense conflict than non-intimate dyads (Cahn, 1992; Roloff & Soule, 2002).[6] According to Braiker and Kelley (1979), intimate partners exhibit mutual dependence, reflected in the mere fact that they experience conflict.[7] Conflicts of interest, and decision-making conflict, therefore play an important role in the continuance and development of this interdependence, as well as the norms and standards that constitute a close relationship, and contributes to a unique sense of identity for the partners. Such relational features are similar to those of nations and cultural groups with shared borders, histories and resources; therefore the examination of interpersonal relationships across

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[6] Neither Cahn (1992) nor Roloff and Soule (2002) specified what population(s) provided the basis for these findings; Roloff and Soule (2002) summarized numerous studies. These are three trends I identified in reading this review that describe special qualities of intimate relationships and their conflict.

[7] Braiker and Kelley (1999) do not specify what population(s) are the basis of this observation either (we may assume White?). They make this assertion to help define "close relationships," as I do here.

cultures *may* shed light on larger socio-cultural-historical dynamics, despite these being different units of analysis.

Finally, most of the existing studies related to this topic were based on self-report questionnaires – and study participants were usually university students. Such methods lend themselves to certain biases; for example, people do not always accurately describe their own behavior (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). While useful, such research must be expanded and challenged through additional methods, such as field interviews, interaction or conversation analysis, and ethnographic research. The diversity of the people and deep artistic, spiritual quality of much of Mexican culture require reciprocal diversity and artistry in methods.

To summarize, I have established that a study of intercultural conflict dynamics in interpersonal relationships between Mexican and U.S. American intimate partners is important for several reasons. Due to recent demographic, economic and political trends, Mexicans and U.S. Americans are coming into more frequent contact, and will therefore have increasing opportunity for interaction and, therefore, communication and conflict. Also, there is little communication research to inform and guide us as to how and when such conflict might occur and be handled successfully. There are no studies specifically on *inter*cultural conflict between U.S. Americans and Mexicans, only cross-cultural comparisons and intracultural communication research. Problems in macro intercultural relations may stem from interpersonal micro conflicts, and interpersonal conflicts may manifest larger social structural issues. Also, most existing research related to this topic was conducted via self-report questionnaires, which suggests it may be useful to attempt other methods to provide a more balanced view of this communication phenomenon.

Finally, in an increasingly postmodern world of paradoxes, muted boundaries and multiple selves, the future may belong to those who successfully navigate interactions between themselves and myriad "others."   The future of the United States may, in part, depend on its citizens' ability to more successfully navigate relationships with "others" south of (and within) its borders – with Mexicans and their descendants. A study such as this may not only have vital practical applications for larger nations and groups, but also very real and positive consequences for the increasing number of people that find themselves in U.S. American-Mexican interpersonal intersections, whether in intimate relationships or otherwise.

<div align="center">Theoretical Framework</div>

The theoretical framework I employ in the present study is a synthesis. I organize my approach, research questions, and results around a model of conflict antecedents, behaviors, and consequences that emerged from the review of literature. I explain both this literature and the model in detail in chapter two (see in particular the conclusion beginning on page 59). Additionally, I approach this model with a critical and postcolonial theoretical lens, and an orientation towards local/emergent meanings. In this section, I briefly explain each of these approaches.

As a critical theorist, I try to identify ways in which people express, or seem to be affected by, dominant or hegemonic forms of discourse – for example, around issues of gender and race – as well as ways in which they enact various forms of oppression. Gender, race, ethnicity, and social class are classic concerns of critical theorists, along with the role of institutions in shaping social life, issues of individual agency, and the vital role of historical and material relations in providing context for human relations

(Held, 1980). Since this study aims to reveal interpersonal dynamics between members

of two cultures with vastly disparate economic, material and historical power, and who

belong to nations which have historically been, and continue to be, in a (neo)colonial

relationship, I will also employ a postcolonial framework, such as that suggested by

Gandhi (1998).   Such an approach addresses issues of cultural dislocation, hybridity and

the manifestation of macro (neo)colonial relations on an individual level. Ignoring

historical imbalances of power between the United States and Mexico and the inequality

experienced by Mexicans in U.S. American, and U.S. Anglo contexts (Niemann, Romero,

Arredondo, & Rodríguez, 1999) would be a grave oversight in analyzing interpersonal

conflict between U.S. Americans and Mexicans.

I am also interested in pursuing what Deetz (2001) terms a local/emergent

research orientation, which is a critical approach of sorts. Contrasted with what Deetz

calls an elite/a priori orientation, the local/emergent approach focuses on participant-

based meanings, flexibility in language, a dynamic rather than static research process,

cumulative insight rather than universal generalizations, and attention to the situational

nature of the study at hand. This approach involves a play between and among

communities, not imposed vocabulary or constructs, and values multiple forms of

rationality of both researcher and study participants. It challenges the notion of the

researcher as a privileged expert with privileged language, and views participants as what

Orbe (1996, 1998), in writings on his co-cultural theory, terms "co-researchers." It is

similar to what Owen (1984) referred to as a naturalistic study, which relies on

"unimposed lay conceptions of actual communication episodes in current relationships"

(p. 274).

Keeping this theoretical framework in mind, it is important to mention relevant aspects of my personal framework at work in the present study. I enter this project as a relatively privileged member of a globally dominant culture, yet aware of this fact and intent on being self-reflexive throughout the research process. I am a racially mixed (but mostly European American), culturally atypical U.S. American who is sometimes perceived as a U.S. American, and sometimes as a Latina or Latin American. I am light-skinned and generally seen as White. I am a woman, middle class, and well educated. While I have extensive personal and professional experience with intercultural conflict between U.S. Americans and Mexicans, I am open to whatever insight the project reveals. (See the Methods section under "Role of Researcher" for more discussion on my personal traits and their potential impact on this study.)

Use of Terms

In keeping with a critical approach, and as a communication scholar, I must pay special attention to language use and local/emergent meanings as expressed in language. Therefore, I must clarify the vocabulary used throughout this study. First, there are various terms that must be defined for the purpose of this research. To simplify the concept of "intimate partners" and create more uniformity among participant characteristics, I limit my study to married couples. The term "marital partners" thus refers to dyads of romantically and sexually involved heterosexual partners that have been married and cohabiting for at least one year.

"Interpersonal conflict" refers to any incident or interaction that one or both of the relational partners *perceive* as conflict (however they define or articulate "conflict"), or disruptive in any way. "Managing," or "conflict management," refer to the process of

understanding and handling interpersonal conflict, whether in a way seen as beneficial or harmful by the participants, and whether leading to resolution, escalation, or continuation of the conflict. "Management" of conflict here does not necessarily imply resolution, but includes resolution as a possibility. "Strategies" refers to any actions, words or behaviors (or lack thereof) that, consciously or unconsciously, serve to manage the conflict for the partners.

Second, a word must be said about ethnic labels, since much of the literature that provides background for this study was conducted with people of Mexican descent in the U.S., and not Mexicans. It is important to note that the following are not *racial* terms. The traditional (essentialist) concept of race is generally based on inherited genetic traits and their physical manifestations, while ethnicity refers in part to physical traits, but also naturalized identity, birthplace, nationality, ancestry or beliefs about one's ancestry, language, religion or culture (Appadurai, 1996; Bennett, 1998; Hoopes & Pusch, 1979; Spickard, 1992; Ting-Toomey, 1999). And while numerous definitions of "culture" exist, I conceptualize culture as similar in nature to ethnicity, but even broader and less tied to any physical traits.

Labels for people of Mexican descent have often been perceived or used as racial terms (Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987), despite the fact that most individuals of Mexican and Latin American descent are multiracial (Alcoff, 2000; Fernández, 1992) and therefore terms referring to these individuals are ethnic labels. Also, while I believe that race is largely a social construction only loosely based in biological fact (Hohman, 2001; Root, 1992; Spickard, 1992), I conceptualize it in essentialist terms for this study for two reasons. First, most people still conceive of race as separate, identifiable categories for

people which then display certain traits. Whether or not these categories are truly distinct or "real" is irrelevant vis-à-vis the real impact their perception has on identity and human interaction. Second, the concept of race, unlike ethnicity, *is* based at least partially on tangible physical markers such as hair color and texture, skin color, eye shape and color, nose shape, etc.

With regards to various definitions used throughout this study, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, a "Mexican" is a Mexican national; a person born in Mexico, or of Mexican nationality, regardless of race or ethnicity, and who identifies as such. Studies involving Mexican Americans are being included in the present review because, although the two groups are not the same, more communication research has been done on Mexican Americans than Mexicans, and discussing this literature helps complete the picture of the current state of affairs in the communication discipline as context for the present research.

The term "Mexican American" is used throughout this paper to refer to persons of Mexican descent, born and residing within the current national borders of the United States. This term has political connotations and is not universally recognized as a general or "midpoint" term for this population (Mirandé & Tanno, 1993a). However, it is more specific than "Hispanic" or "Latino," has less regional connotations than either of those terms, is politically broader than "Chicano" and is more semantically accurate than "Mexican." "Mexican American" is also the term most researchers used in the studies described in the literature review, so mirroring their word choice stays true to their reports of findings, whether or not the term was "accurate," or preferred by their research participants. I use other terms where necessary to describe other concepts (i.e., "Latino"

to refer to all people of Latin American descent living in the U.S., as Hayes-Bautista and Chapa, 1987, suggest) or to mirror particular researchers' term use.

A "U.S. American" is a national of the United States; a person born in the U.S., or of U.S. American nationality, regardless of race or ethnicity, and who identifies as such. While most people use the term "American" to refer to individuals from the United States, many Latin Americans, including Mexicans, often point out that they, too, as natives and residents of the American continent, are also *americanos/as* [Americans]. Mexicans sometimes even assert that they are also *North* Americans, so this is not an appropriate term for U.S. nationals either. Therefore, to honor and respect these geological and historical facts, especially in a study of this nature involving *americanos/as* from various regions of the continent, I, much like scholars such as Bennett (1998) and Lindsley and Braithwaite (1996), prefer the term "U.S. American."

An "Anglo," then, is a racially White U.S. American of any European American ethnic descent, regardless of generation or length of residence in the United States. "Anglo" is a problematic term because not all U.S. Americans of European descent are ethnically (or culturally) Anglo Saxon in origin. It is also not a widely preferred identifier that U.S. Americans of European American descent use to refer to themselves (Martin, Krizek, Nakayama, & Bradford, 1999). However, I selected "Anglo" for three reasons. First, many Mexicans, including participants in the present study, are racially White or Caucasian, ethnically European in origin, and even self-identify as White. Terms such as "White," "Caucasian," or "European" can be applied to Mexicans as well as U.S. Americans, and often are. Second, the term "Anglo" is often seen as indicating not only racial Whiteness, but also northern European, particularly English, ethnicity or

culture (Martin et al., 1999). "Anglo" is therefore a cultural term as well as a racial identifier that differentiates U.S. American Whiteness (largely northern European in origin) from Mexican Whiteness (largely Spanish in origin). Third, "Anglo" is a current term widely recognized as referring to White U.S. Americans of European descent. "Anglo," therefore, effectively designates White U.S. Americans of European origin without confusing race with culture. While Whiteness is an important social and rhetorical construction (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995) not to be ignored or treated lightly, it is an issue both U.S. Americans and Mexicans grapple with, and fully examining its nuances is beyond the scope of the present study.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

It was my purpose to undertake a study that would begin to close the gap in communication research, and start to bridge the divide between Mexicans and U.S. Americans who find themselves in conflict with each other. More specifically, I aimed to examine the ways Mexican and U.S. American marital partners perceive and describe how they manage interpersonal conflict with each other. My principal research question is broad and inductive:

RQ1: How do U.S. American and Mexican marital partners perceive and describe the ways they manage interpersonal conflict with each other?

This initial question inspired three sub-questions that expand on the principal question:

RQ1a: What are the principal issues or antecedents that create and frame interpersonal conflict between U.S. American and Mexican marital partners?

RQ1b: What are the different strategies employed by U.S. American and Mexican marital partners in managing interpersonal conflict with each other?

RQ1c: What are the consequences of interpersonal conflict for U.S. American and Mexican marital partners?

While I provide more detail and rationale for these research questions at the end of the next chapter, I now take on the task of reviewing the existing communication literature that provided some background for these research questions, and context for the present study.

The following pages are divided into chapters that cover different aspects and phases of this project. Chapter two consists of the literature review, in which I describe and analyze relevant existing studies on romantic relational conflict and cross-cultural and intercultural conflict. Chapter three covers study methods, including participant characteristics, data collection procedures and method of data analysis. In chapter four I describe the results—various themes and sub themes, and my interpretation. Finally, chapter five consists of the discussion, in which I relate my findings back to existing literature and my original research questions, address theoretical and practical implications and study limitations, and conclude with some final personal reflections.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing published studies provide context and a point of departure for the present

research. Since there is so little work on the intercultural dynamic between U.S.

Americans and Mexicans, and nothing specifically on conflict between Mexican and

Anglo marital partners, I consider a broad range of studies. Two areas of research

relevant to the present study are: (a) conflict between romantic relational partners, and (b)

cross-cultural and intercultural conflict, particularly that involving Mexicans, Mexican

Americans and U.S. Americans or Anglos.

I review the romantic relational partner literature, then the cross-cultural and

intercultural literature, by organizing existing research into three categories: antecedents

to conflict, conflict behavior, and consequences of conflict. I do this for two reasons.

First, studies seem to group naturally into these categories. Second, scholars are

increasingly finding that conflict is best described and understood by including a variety

of "before, during, and after" factors, not just a couple dimensions like the two in the

dual-concern model (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001), for

instance, describe a Culture-Based Situational Conflict Model which integrates (a)

individual primary orientation factors, (b) situational features, (c) conflict process factors,

and (d) conflict competence criteria and outcomes. Both models are explicated in greater

detail, but this shows that my approach of addressing conflict antecedents, behavior and

consequences is a valid one.

Romantic Relational Conflict Research

The context of romantic relationships presents a unique conflict dynamic. Romantic relationships, including marriage, differ from other relationships and therefore conflict behavior often presents and is expressed differently (Gottman, 1994; Sereno, Welch & Braaten, 1987). In general, conflict is usually more intense and frequent in intimate social relationships, particularly in family and romantic contexts (Roloff & Soule, 2002), and such relationships exhibit a high degree of interdependence (Braiker & Kelley, 1979).

The literature on marital and intimate relationship conflict provides some insight on issues that might surface during conflict between U.S. American and Mexican marital partners, as well as support for why this relational context may be a particularly salient one for studying intercultural conflict. For instance, most intimate relationships are at least occasionally affected by conflict (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995), and a common source of relational conflict is a difference in the partners' perception of the conflict (Hojjat, 2000). Different perceptions, as we will see, are also an issue in intercultural interactions.

Relevant studies fall into three categories: antecedents to conflict, conflict behavior, and consequences of conflict. Antecedents to conflict include gender, conflict behavior includes conflict styles, and emotions and expression, and the section on consequences of conflict explores conflict competence and relationship satisfaction.

Antecedents to Conflict: Gender

Conflict antecedents provide context for conflict and set the stage for conflict communication. Several non-conflict behaviors and traits may lead to conflict in intimate

relationships, such as age, length of relationship, relationship type or stage, relationship quality, individual personality, beliefs about relationships and conflict, and expectations (Booth, Crouter, & Clements, 2001; Cahn, 1992; Canary et al., 1995). Cahn (1992) reviewed literature on problem behaviors and identified various topics (e.g., communication, sex, relations with in-laws, chores) that may lead to conflict in intimate relationships. Zietlow and Sillars (1988) described the different approaches to conflict taken by couples of varying ages. Canary et al. (1995) reviewed literature on how conflict varies across developmental stages of relationships, and differences between couples that are casual, serious, engaged, or married. Canary, Cunningham, and Cody (1988) looked at the effect of personality traits, such as locus of control, on conflict.

One major antecedent that is particularly relevant to marital conflict and frequently addressed in the literature is sex or gender. While "sex" denotes biological qualities that determine whether one is male or female, "gender" is a social construction that refers to culturally constructed conceptions of masculinity and femininity – that is, the *meaning* that society confers on biological sex (Wood, 2003). Gender is an issue in intimate heterosexual relationships that sometimes goes unaddressed in research on interpersonal conflict across cultures. According to the sex-stereotypes hypothesis, men typically rely on competitive, negative behaviors and women enact positive, passive behaviors (Cupach & Canary, 1995). However, relational context matters. Gottman (1994) found that women may defer in stranger dyads, but are more likely to confront in intimate relationships.

Still, *perception* of gender and gender roles may have more of an impact on conflict than actual behavior. In a study involving 363 undergraduate students that

responded to hypothetical conflict scenarios and brief questionnaires, Canary and

Spitzberg (1987) found that women were perceived as more generally appropriate than

men, but only with regard to integrative strategies, and that gender had no impact on

whether a communicator was perceived to have obtained his or her conflict goal. In an

interview-based study of 219 newlyweds, Acitelli, Douvan and Veroff (1993) found that

perceived similarity in conflict style is greater than actual similarity of responses for

newlyweds. Wives' understanding of their husbands' behaviors was related positively to

their marital satisfaction, while husbands' understanding of their own behaviors predicted

their satisfaction. The authors speculated that, as the individuals possessing greater

power, husbands have no need to understand wives, while wives need to understand

husbands in order to maintain some sense of control and access to the husband's

resources. Gottman and Levenson (1988) advanced a similar hypothesis, that wives are

more likely than husbands to "take responsibility for regulating the affective balance in a

marriage" (p. 232) and keep the couple focused on problem solving.

Hojjat (2000) obtained similar results with regards to how men and women in

intimate relationships perceived their own conflict management behaviors, and those of

their partner. In his study of 60 heterosexual couples that completed his Conflict

Management Questionnaire, women were found to be more likely than men to assert

themselves when trying to resolve conflict, and became more negative and active when

dissatisfied, while men became more negative and passive. Women were also more

accurate in their ratings of both their own and their partners' conflict behaviors than were

men. Finally, accurate perception of one's partner's behaviors was positively related to

the partners' satisfaction. This has implications for satisfaction in intercultural couples

especially, in which different perceptions might be more prevalent, and the need for empathy greater.

In an interesting examination of gender and power, Christensen and Heavey (1990), took a closer look at whether the common woman demand-man withdraw pattern was due to individual socialization into gender roles, or social structure. Social structure was conceptualized as one in which women are unhappy with the status quo due to their relatively low position and therefore pressure for change, while men are satisfied with the status quo and avoid or withdraw from confrontation because it may lead to change. By studying 31 predominantly White couples by administering questionnaires and taping marital interactions, they found empirical support for both; however, only "withdrawingness" showed a significant gender effect (for men). Women showed an insignificant gender effect for demanding. Overall, the data were more compelling for the view that this pattern is due to social structure, not individual socialization. The authors suggested that male need for autonomy and the maintenance of the status quo can be achieved unilaterally. Female need for closeness and change requires cooperation. Therefore, women are at a disadvantage and have no recourse except to demand, and men have nothing to gain from the confrontation, and so avoid or withdraw.

Finally, gender has a different effect on intimate relationships than non-intimate relationships. By administering a questionnaire describing a hypothetical situation to 96 undergraduate students, Kluwer, de Dreu and Buunk (1998) explored the differences in whether self-other bias (attribution bias) or gender stereotypes took precedence in judging another's conflict behavior in both intimate and non-intimate relationships. They found that people saw themselves as more cooperative and less competitive than their

partners, especially in intimate relationships. In non-intimate, opposite-sex relationships, judgments were based more on gender stereotypes – women judged men as less cooperative and more competitive, and men judged women as more cooperative and less competitive – than self-other bias.

Based on this brief review of research on conflict antecedents as presented in literature on romantic relational conflict, a very general picture emerges from the variety of findings which demonstrate overall the complexity of relational conflict and the importance of context. First, gender seems to be a major focus of literature dealing with marital and romantic relational conflict. Second, men and women act differently in intimate or marital conflict than in conflict with non-partners. This reinforces the special nature of intimate relationship conflict I described in the introduction chapter. Third, perception (e.g., of gender roles, conflict styles, one's partner) is as important in conflict as actual behavior. Fourth, women tend to be somewhat more perceptive of themselves and their partners, somewhat more "appropriate" in conflict, and seem to take on more responsibility for conflict management than men. Scholars suggest this is due to women's relative lack of power vis-à-vis men and consequent position of greater vulnerability in conflict, perhaps greater investment in its management, and yet limited access to effective management strategies. However, many of these studies were conducted on university students in the United States, and most do not specify the race, ethnicity or culture of the participants except for one study done primarily with White participants. Such results therefore may not apply to the very different population I examine here.

Conflict Behavior

A second category of relevant research in relational conflict examines the dynamics that occur between people during an actual conflict. Two areas of conflict behavior emerged from the literature on romantic relational partner conflict: (a) conflict styles and (b) emotion and expression.

Conflict Styles

Conflict style describes a person's general typified response to conflict (Putnam & Poole, 1987). One of the most prevalent measures of conflict style is the dual concern model, which was based on previous models, such as Blake and Mouton's (1964) early work, and first articulated by Pruitt and Rubin (1986). In this model, individuals fall on various points in a quadrant defined by two axes: concern for one's own outcomes and concern for others' outcomes. Five styles result: integrating (high concern for self and high concern for other; also called "collaborating"), obliging (low concern for self and high concern for other; also called "accommodating), dominating (high concern for self and low concern for other; also called "competing"), avoiding (low concern for self and low concern for other; also called "withdrawing") and compromising (moderate concern for self and moderate concern for other) (Cai & Fink, 2002).

More work using the dual concern model has been conducted in intercultural conflict research than romantic relational conflict research, which I will explicate in a later section. However, in romantic relational research, three studies devised an innovative approach to conflict styles not covered elsewhere, or shed light on the way accepted styles function in intimate relationships. Straus (1979) focused on modes of conflict and resolution. He created the Conflict Tactics Scale, which measures three

clusters of conflict tactics: rationality (discussion, argument and reason), verbal aggression (verbal and nonverbal acts intended to hurt or threaten) and physical aggression. While these clusters have emerged in other research, this model has received most attention for its inclusion of physical aggression as a conflict tactic. This is also one of its weaknesses, as the other two clusters sometimes receive less attention as a result. However, the three clusters are not incompatible with the dual concern model; both types of aggression may be characterized as dominating styles, while "rationality" may be an integrating style.

Pistole (1989) looked at how three different attachment styles affect partners' approaches to relational conflict in her questionnaire study of 137 primarily White undergraduate psychology students. The "secure" attachment style manifests in confident emotional attachment, the "anxious/ambivalent" style is characterized by clinginess, neediness and emotional ambivalence and the "avoidant" style is characterized by emotional distance and self-reliance. The securely attached were found to experience higher relationship satisfaction, and were more likely to use integrating conflict styles as their sense of self was not threatened. Avoidants did not use integrating styles, and did not prefer obliging strategies because these required more of a focus on the partner and therefore increased risk of rejection and emotional distress, both of which are threatening to an avoidant. However, they might use compromising conflict styles as long as the focus remained on goals and the external environment. The anxious attached did not do well with the compromising styles because this requires a focus on goals and a shift away from preoccupation with the partner.

Kurdek (1994a) also conducted research to create conflict resolution styles in his study of 126 gay and lesbian couples and 207 heterosexual couples (with or without children), the majority of which were White and well-educated, especially the gay/lesbian couples. He devised four conflict resolution styles for couples: positive problem solving (compromise and negotiation), conflict engagement (personal attacks and losing control), withdrawal (refusing to discuss), and compliance (giving in to the other partner). He related these styles to relationship satisfaction, and found that homosexual *and* heterosexual couples experienced high satisfaction if they frequently used positive problem solving tactics and infrequently used conflict engagement or withdrawal. Frequent use of conflict engagement and withdrawal tactics led to decreased relationship satisfaction.

Emotion and Expression

A couple studies addressed the issue of emotion or affect in relational conflict, a second factor in relational conflict behavior. Sereno, Welch and Braaten (1987) studied how the expression of anger by a person in a close relationship affected the receiver's perceptions of the appropriateness, competence and satisfaction of that expression by asking 130 undergraduate students to rate hypothetical scenarios. Three levels of justification (low, moderate and high) and three types of expression (assertive, nonassertive and aggressive) were measured. The authors found that nonassertive expression was evaluated positively for all three levels of justification and more positively than assertive expression for low and moderate levels of justification on competence and appropriateness. Nonassertion was also rated more positively than assertion for all levels of justification on the measure of satisfaction. This contradicts

common assumptions and other research demonstrating that assertion is seen as positive and nonassertion as negative, suggesting that such assumptions and research do not apply to intimate relationships, in which saving face, empathy and perhaps a feeling that one should not have to assert oneself in an intimate relationship, apply.

Overall, the role of negative and positive emotions and affect in relational conflict is somewhat ambiguous in the literature. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) videotaped and administered questionnaires to 25 couples, and found that wives' satisfaction improved over time if they expressed anger and contempt during conflict, but decreased if they displayed fear or sadness. However, Gottman and Levenson (2000) found that although negative affect during conflict predicted early divorcing, it was the *absence of positive affect* in conflict, and not the presence of negative affect, that was most predictive of later divorcing. Lack of positive affective connection in non-conflict, routine conversations also predicted divorce.

While the romantic relational literature on conflict behavior provides some interesting insights, particularly around conceptualizations of conflict styles, results in general seem to be inconclusive, perhaps further demonstrating the presence and importance of multiple factors on how conflict is enacted. There are also a few flaws with this research. First, most of the studies were done on U.S. Anglos, or the authors did not specify the race or ethnicity of their participants. Such results may or may not apply to Mexicans or U.S. Americans in intercultural marriages with Mexicans. Second, many of the studies were also conducted on the unique population that is university undergraduate students. Third, the majority of the studies were quantitative in nature, relying mostly on participant recalled responses to questionnaires and scales involving

standardized measures. Finally, by their very nature, typologies such as conflict styles tend to oversimplify and distill people's textured responses and behaviors into discrete categories that may not actually be static, discrete, or fully representative of their rich, contextual realities.

Consequences of Conflict

A third category of literature explores the consequences of romantic relational conflict. Consequences include matters such as how participants experience the result or resolution of conflict communication. Two relevant areas are conflict competence and relationship satisfaction.

Conflict Competence

Behavior seen as competent is considered both effective and appropriate (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Conflict communication that is considered effective and appropriate is therefore seen as competent. In a study investigating how conflict strategies and communicator gender affected perceived competence, appropriateness and effectiveness, Canary and Spitzberg (1987) found that effective behavior was not necessarily seen as appropriate. While integrative styles were considered the most effective and appropriate, assertive styles were seen as intelligent and fair, but less likeable. Avoidant tendencies were seen as much more effective in intimate relationship scenarios presented to respondents than roommate scenarios. Also, opposite sex intimates were more sanctioned to use, and more likely to use, various conflict tactics than same sex roommate dyads. Once again, intimate relationships pose a unique conflict context not well studied in competence literature.

Relationship Satisfaction

A second area of the relational conflict literature on consequences examines the relationship between conflict approaches and relationship satisfaction. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that conflict engagement is functional for a marriage over time, but it may be dysfunctional over time if conflict indicates defensiveness, stubbornness and withdrawal (especially on the part of the husband). Wives' satisfaction improved over time if they expressed anger and contempt during conflict, but decreased if they displayed fear or sadness. For husbands, only whining predicted a decline in their satisfaction, as well as a decline in their wives' satisfaction. Kurdek's (1994a) findings challenged Gottman and Krokoff (1989) about the role of conflict engagement being functional over time, but corroborated their results on withdrawal. In fact, infrequent positive problem solving and frequent conflict engagement predicted dissolution. Compliance style was the only style least related to relationship outcomes.

Later that same year, Kurdek (1994b), using the same participants as for his other study (1994a), examined what homosexual and heterosexual couples fight *about* and searched for links between conflict content and relationship satisfaction. The top two areas of conflict were intimacy (sex and affection) and power (insults, criticism, lack of equality, excessive demands, possessiveness), both areas of high interdependence between partners. Other areas included social issues, personal flaws, distrust, and personal distance. Frequent conflict over power and intimacy was more salient to lower relationship satisfaction, however, only power was linked to low concurrent relationship satisfaction *and* decreased satisfaction over time.

Summary

Research on intimate relational and marital conflict supports my assertion that such relationships may provide a special context for intercultural conflict, and that such conflict may manifest differently than in other types of relationships. Studies also demonstrate how issues of emotional attachment, selected styles and strategies on relationship satisfaction and stability, the role of emotion and affect, and the dynamic of real and perceived gender differences and power inequalities are all factors that must be considered in investigating intercultural marital interactions. My review also revealed some of the weaknesses in the literature; particularly its reliance on university student participants, reliance on quantitative methods like questionnaires, tendency to categorize people and behaviors into discrete types, and either a concentration of U.S. American Anglo participants, or failure to discern or report participants' race and ethnicity.

Also, there was no identified literature specifically on conflict in interracial or interethnic intimate relationships. Such research might have been relevant to conflict in culturally mixed U.S. American- Mexican marriages that included racial and/or ethnic differences between the partners. Prior studies focused on a variety of other topics: interracial relationship initiation (primarily African American and Anglo) (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000); outside perceptions of interracial couples and friends (Garcia & Rivera, 1999); interracial couples' success strategies (Foeman & Nance, 2002); intermarriage rates and determinants (Anderson & Saenz, 1994; Fernandez & Holscher, 1983); effect of intermarriage on the children of those unions and effect of intermarriage on ethnic identity (Salgado de Snyder & Padilla, 1988); value differences in intermarriage and their effects (Salinas, 1986); cross-cultural comparisons of dominance

in relational decision-making (Cromwell & Cromwell, 1978); cross-cultural beliefs about marriage and love (Oropesa, 1996); and relationship satisfaction (Contreras, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1996; Negy & Snyder, 2000). The literature that mentions Latinos focuses only on domestic U.S. groups (Mexican Americans, Latinos, Chicanos, and Mexican immigrants of varying degrees of assimilation). There is nothing specifically on conflict, and nothing on Mexican-U.S. American couples' conflict communication dynamic, even in literature on cross-national marriage (Cottrell, 1990).

<div align="center">Cross-cultural and Intercultural Conflict Research</div>

There is, however, plenty of research on cross-cultural and intercultural conflict in interpersonal relationships, which may begin to fill some of the gaps in romantic relational conflict literature. Current research on cross-cultural comparisons and intercultural conflict between U.S. Anglos and Mexicans can be organized around three themes similar to those of the romantic relationship literature: antecedents to conflict, conflict behavior and consequences of conflict. Antecedents to conflict comprise mostly of cultural values. Conflict behavior includes conflict styles, and emotion and expression. Finally, consequences of conflict include matters such as interpersonal communication competence and communication satisfaction.

<div align="center">*Antecedents to Conflict: Cultural Values*</div>

Before communication or conflict begins between culturally different individuals, there are several factors already in place that provide context for the interaction and set the stage for what follows. One such factor is cultural values. Examining cultural aspects of interpersonal conflict is crucial because cultural systems pervade, and are inextricably linked to, individual psychology (Markus & Lin, 1999). Also on an

individual basis, culture and communication are mutually causal – they each continually create and recreate the other in an ongoing, dynamic process – and "communication research is culture-bound" (Hecht et al., 1990, p. 32). Because culture and communication are enmeshed, and values are an essential ingredient of culture and therefore of communication, it is prudent to examine unique features of Mexican culture that may affect conflict with U.S. Americans, and vice versa. Five cultural values are particularly unique to Mexicans, central to Mexican culture, and salient to U.S. American-Mexican conflict because they are different from U.S. American values. These are individualism-collectivism, power distance, *respeto*, *simpatía*, and communication consistency, each of which I explicate in detail in the following section, including some thoughts on how that value contrasts with mainstream U.S. American values. I conclude with some additional information about U.S. American values.

Individualism and Collectivism

Individualism and collectivism are traditionally seen as polar opposites on a continuum that describes a basic level of societal organization and individual orientation within cultures.[8] It is here that the deepest cultural differences lie, according to many scholars. Individualism, typical of the United States, describes a culture in which the interests, activities and goals of the individual are primary. Collectivistic societies, which are the global majority, emphasize relationship, obligation to ingroups and the subsuming of personal interests and needs to the good of the group or community (Triandis, 1995). While any such generalizations should be made with caution, and any culture includes a

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[8]However, recent research disputes this notion. Some scholars now propose that individualism and collectivism are not actually polar opposites, but rather orthogonally related but completely separate dimensions that coexist and vary, but not in opposition to one another (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Kim & Leung, 2000; Kim et al., 1996).

wide range of diversity (Hoopes, 1979), Mexico is described as a collectivist culture and many Mexicans therefore display collectivist tendencies (Hofstede, 1997).

Typical of collectivists, Mexicans generally see themselves as more closely interconnected than do U.S. Americans, but they also value self-analysis and knowledge of their unique qualities more than U.S. Americans, which is not typically a collectivist trait (Gabrielidis et al., 1997). One way to describe this difference is that the U.S. emphasizes individualism and Mexico values *individuality* (Condon, 1985). Both value the individual, but U.S. Americans believe that people are basically the same barring external life influences, each person should be judged by her character or individual merit, and this merit (and one's personal worth) manifests in one's actions. Mexicans believe in the inherent, innate uniqueness of a person that is not always evident through actions or achievements. It is a concept closer to "soul" than "character" and the dignity of a person, regardless of social class, must therefore be protected and respected (Condon, 1985).

Clear ingroup and outgroup distinctions are an important feature of collectivist cultures. Triandis (1990) emphasized that collectivists deal more differently with ingroups and outgroups than individualists, and pay more attention to ingroups. Ingroups consist of those people that are closest and most important to an individual. Collectivists experience more intimacy with ingroups and less with outgroups than individualists. Collectivists see less distance between the self and ingroup members, and more distance between the self and outgroup members than individualists. They view ingroups as homogeneous, while individualists see outgroups as more homogeneous than ingroups (Triandis, 1990). In *maquiladoras*, although U.S. Americans may learn through

mistakes, "incompetencies in intercultural interaction result in highlighting the U.S. American's outsider group status" (Lindsley & Braithwaite, 1996, p. 218). This may have negative implications for the U.S. American's effectiveness in a context where relationships and ingroup membership are essential to harmony and proper organizational and interpersonal functionality.

The maintenance of group harmony is another important feature of collectivism, and the value of harmony and "saving face" are, in fact, a source of intercultural conflict between U.S. Americans and Mexicans. Individualistic U.S. Americans tend to focus on personal concerns, or "self face," while Mexicans emphasize the other person, or "other face," and the maintenance of group harmony and relational solidarity across levels of hierarchy (Lindsley & Braithwaite, 1996). Demonstrating *respeto* – respect of another's dignity – to all, and expressing appropriate deference or asserting appropriate superordination within the hierarchy through indirect language use that is commonly understood, is another way of maintaining harmony without being overt (García, 1996).

According to Markus and Lin (1999), individualism and collectivism support different notions of what conflict is, how to define personhood, and what it means to be a good or proper person. All these issues are central to conflict resolution. Ideological individualism gives the separate, nonsocial individual ontological priority. A person or self is seen as separate from an external situation, solely responsible for his or her behavior and embodying the final explanation for that behavior. Conflict involves the direct expression of one's ideas, the right to disagree and remain "unmoved" by the other, and the belief that there is one truth that can be found through sufficient debate, which is why freedom and self- expression are not only of paramount importance, but seen as an

individualist's *duty*. By contrast, in collectivist worlds, the boundary between the self and others is not as defined; self-expression is often subsumed to meeting others' expectations and responsibilities, and hierarchy operates through reciprocity, not the imposition of the superior's will (Markus & Lin, 1999). Relational themes in satisfying communication such as acceptance, worldview, negative stereotyping and relational solidarity reflect Mexican collectivism in communication (Hecht et al., 1990).

Laypersons and researchers sometimes assume all persons exhibit the same level of their culture's individualism or collectivism, but substantial variation within groups may exist, as David Hoopes' (1979) famous bell-curved graph of cultural "preponderance of belief" demonstrates. For example, Oetzel (1998) found that "self-construal" is a better predictor of conflict style than ethnic/cultural background. Self-construal refers to the way that an individual regards him or herself, and is linked to the individualism-collectivism dimension. Self-construal may be "independent," or relying solely on one's own feelings, thoughts and actions, or "interdependent," that is, relying on relationships and connections with others in the individual's social world to determine sense of self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Regardless of individual differences in self-construal, Mexicans as a group are generally regarded as collectivistic, and therefore interdependent and concerned with ingroup relationships over outgroup relationships, as is typical for collectivists or "allocentrics" (Kim & Leung, 2000). I believe self-construal as an identity issue is likely a function of culture rather than an independent factor in determining conflict style. Collectivists have interdependent self-construal; it is part of what makes them collectivists. Self-construal and identity formation do not occur in a vacuum. If culture,

psychology and communication co-create each other, perhaps an individual's self-construal is, in large measure, a function of his or her culture and/or acculturation level. In many senses, culture is comprised of the multiple ways that its constituent individuals construe their "selves" and vice versa. In fact, self-construal (and individualism and collectivism, for that matter) may actually be more dynamic and contextual, and more multidimensional, than simple dichotomies leave room for.

Also, certain cultures support or discourage certain types of self-construal. An independent collectivist may be an uncommon minority member of his society while an interdependent individualist might be equally uncommon in hers, although the likelihood of this may be waning due to an increasingly global society. Such is the nature of the interconnectedness of these concepts that some scholars use the term "interdependents" as a synonym for collectivists (Kim & Leung, 2000; Markus & Lin, 1999) or cite interdependence as an essential ingredient of collectivism (Gabrielidis et al., 1997; Triandis, 1990). Indeed, according to Kim and Leung (2000), "independent and interdependent construals of self are among the most important self-schemata for distinguishing culture" (p. 244). Nevertheless, the concept of self-construal adds an interesting dimension to the individualism-collectivism dynamic, and findings on the effect of self-construal on conflict style are relevant to the present study.

Power Distance

Hofstede (1997) defines power distance as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (p. 28). Countries and cultures with large power distances tend to be more hierarchical, with greater, more obvious distinctions between social classes,

which differ in their access to benefits of society such as education and entry into certain occupations (Hofstede, 1997). Members of such cultures emphasize respect for, obedience to, and dependence on elders in the home environment and within the family network, which is sometimes characterized by hierarchies. The educational system and classroom management in high power distance cultures is teacher-centered and relies on obedience and deference to a strong authority as embodied in the teacher, who is a respected figure.

Mexico is classified as a high power distance culture (Hofstede, 1997), and as such, hierarchy and marked power and status differences between individuals are important features of Mexican culture (Condon, 1985; García, 1996). U.S. American culture is generally characterized as low power distance (Hofstede, 1997), and therefore U.S. Americans and Mexicans may differ in degree of comfort with authority and social hierarchies. Although such categorizations subsume individual or group diversity, members of these two cultures in general tend to display marked differences in this area. Triandis, Lisansky, Marín, and Betancourt (1984) found that while U.S. Hispanics might perceive non-Hispanics as less *simpáticos/as* (nice, amiable) for criticizing or competing too much (unseemly behavior in collective, high power distance cultures) and therefore reject them, this perception may be moderated by power distance. Although Hispanics and Mexicans are not the same group, perhaps Mexicans may also view superordinate behavior by high status persons as acceptable and not necessarily lead to rejection.

Respeto and Simpatía

While what constitutes "respect" varies from culture to culture, *respeto*, roughly translated as "respect," is important to maintain both collectivism and power distance in

Mexican culture. *Respeto* is an element of *simpatía,* a "cultural script" or pattern of social interaction not unique to Mexicans, but particular to Latin Americans in general (Triandis et al., 1984). *Simpatía* (roughly, "niceness") refers to permanent personal qualities in a person who is likeable, attractive, fun, easygoing, somewhat conformist, empathetic, behaves with dignity and respect, and strives for harmony in interpersonal relations. A person that is *simpático/a* tries to avoid conflict and maintain harmony by emphasizing the positive over the negative. In a questionnaire study of 90 male Navy recruits (41 self-identified U.S. Hispanics with Spanish surnames and 49 non-Hispanics) who were asked to estimate the likelihood of certain behaviors in a series of various intergroup situations, Triandis et al. (1984) found that Hispanics expect more positive behaviors in positive social situations than non-Hispanics. This means Hispanics expected more frequent pleasant behaviors from others during pleasant interactions. They also were shown to value the externalization of positive feelings. However, bilingual, more acculturated Hispanic respondents de-emphasized negative behaviors less than other Hispanic subgroups. This suggests that while Hispanics appreciate and value a greater frequency and expressiveness of positive behaviors in positive situations than non-Hispanics, negative behaviors are regarded as especially negative. While Mexicans may or may not have been a majority of this "Hispanic" sample, these results suggest that non-Hispanics would do well to be especially positive in interacting with Hispanics, and take great care to not offend or be perceived as displaying negative behaviors.

Communication Consistency

Communication consistency refers to the constancy with which Mexican communication norms hold across contexts, and is a final significant way in which

Mexicans differ culturally from U.S. Americans. According to Hecht et al. (1990), Mexican Americans have a unique communication system – a separate cultural identity – that they maintain through a communication system that remains remarkably consistent across intercultural contexts. Their study involved a qualitative content analysis of questionnaire responses of 38 self-identified Mexican Americans who answered questions regarding a conversation with an Anglo acquaintance. The results, triangulated with a critical analysis of Chicano poetry, identified seven relational themes that emerged in interactions with Anglos: acceptance, expressing emotions, negative stereotyping, worldview (holistic, integrative), self-expression, relational solidarity and "behaving rationally". For Mexican Americans, "demonstrating acceptance, sharing worldviews and avoiding negative stereotypes builds relational solidarity and allows the freedom to be expressive of self and toward others" (p. 49). These findings are consistent with other accounts of satisfying and dissatisfying intraethnic interaction for Mexican Americans (Collier, Ribeau, & Hecht, 1986; Hecht & Ribeau, 1984), and corroborate research showing that, unlike other ethnic groups, Mexican Americans do not adjust communication "rules" to fit a partner's ethnicity (Collier, 1988). While these studies are nearly 20 years old, they are the most recent and relevant to this topic.

Although these studies were conducted with Mexican Americans, not Mexicans, the consistency of Mexican cultural or communication norms appears in other research on Mexicans. In an ethnographic study of organizational communication in *maquiladoras* (U.S.-owned assembly plants located in Mexico) involving 20 interviews and researcher observations in seven plants, Lindsley and Braithwaite (1996) found that, among Mexicans, *intra*cultural face norm violations were attributed to the violator's

personal ineptness, but *inter*cultural norm violations were attributed to the violator's culture. Rather than adapting to the other's cultural characteristics, Mexicans expected the "other" to adapt to them, at least in their context. In the *maquiladoras*, "U.S. Americans who fail to adapt to Mexican face norms are viewed as outsiders in a cultural context where affiliated identity within a social web of connectedness forms the basis for positive relationship" (p. 207). Lindsley and Braithwaite found that norms were the same for peers and for personnel of different status or power levels. In a study of cultural differences in motives for interpersonal communication comparing a general U.S. sample with student samples from Mexico and the U.S., Rubin, Fernandez Collado, and Hernandez-Sampieri (1992) found that Mexicans' interpersonal communication motives remained consistent despite differences in age and gender, while U.S. participants' motives varied somewhat based on age and gender.

Such communication consistency may appear to contradict other cultural values of ingroup-outgroup distinctions valued by collectivists, and power distance. However, it is actually an example of the strength of Mexican collectivism and cultural group identity. Mexicans of varying ages and both sexes communicate for similar reasons. They maintain their norms and communication expectations of others regardless of the "other's" culture or ethnicity. Face norms are applied consistently despite the mitigating factor of power distance. Finally, face norm violations are regarded differently based on ingroup or outgroup status and one's outgroup status is reinforced by failing to adapt to Mexican contexts.

U.S. American Values

There are a few other U.S. American cultural values, besides individualism and low power distance, that merit mention to provide additional context to conflict communication between U.S. Americans and Mexicans. While not commonly a focus of study as much as the identification of values of *other*, non-U.S. cultures, scholars and training practitioners have identified the following values as core: personal control over nature; change as natural and positive; time and its control; equality and fairness; independence/initiative/self-sufficiency; competition; a future orientation; activity/work orientation (tasks taking priority over relationships with people); informality; directness/openness; practicality and efficiency; and materialism/acquisitiveness (Kohls, 1988). McElroy (1999) posits that these values stem from the characteristics and experience of European settlers in what became the United States. Work, for example, was a primary focus of the new settlers, and therefore productivity and efficiency were highly valued. Those who emigrated to the fledgling colonies tended to be more independent, self-determining, and in search of individual freedom, therefore these values shaped U.S. culture. McElroy also mentions the ethnic background of the newcomers as another factor; many of these were English who brought their systems of law and commerce with them.

Research conducted by Hofstede (1997), and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) support these general categories as representative of U.S. American values. Their research, combined with insights by Condon (1985) and Kras (1995) demonstrate that many of these orientations differ greatly from Mexicans' values. Mexicans tend to view nature as having control, change as potentially disruptive, and harmony and group goals

as having primacy over independent individual goals or competition. Relationships are generally given priority over tasks; time is seen as flexible and more oriented towards the present and past; formality and ceremony are preferred over informality; and indirect ways of communicating are common, particularly in communicating with a superior, and when communicating something another person might not want to hear. While Mexican culture is dynamic and diverse, these are some basic, general areas in which their cultural values orientations differ sharply with those held by many U.S. Americans.

Summary

While generalizations should never be made lightly, research on Mexican and U.S. cultural values help paint a picture of what cultural characteristics serve as antecedents to intercultural conflict, setting the stage for interactions. Mexicans want to connect with people and reinforce harmonious relationships. If they are similar to Mexican Americans, they want to feel and demonstrate acceptance, share worldviews, avoid negative stereotypes and enjoy freedom of expression in themselves and others. Mexicans expect others to adapt to their contexts when in those contexts, and they differentiate between their inner circle of intimates and people outside that circle. Those inside the circle receive, and give, preference to others in the circle, and are interdependent with each other. Mexicans appreciate individuals who are aware of and practice nuances of *respeto*. They value the *simpatía* in those who are sociable, positive and help maintain harmony, and they are fairly consistent in their values and expectations across age, gender and status.

Like U.S. Americans, Mexicans communicate for pleasure, affection and inclusion, but to a lesser degree. More than U.S. Americans, Mexicans may put others'

needs and dignity before their own, and place a relationship before other goals or ideas. Mexicans appear similar to U.S. Americans and Anglos in many ways, with differences perhaps mainly in degree, definition and priority. Such subtle dissimilarities can be crucial in conflict, however, and are well defined and illustrated by the difference between individualism and collectivism. Individual differences, such as those expressed by different types of self-construal, can also be crucial, especially when individuals behave or react in ways that may be atypical for most members of their cultural group. Finally, the differences in other basic cultural values may lead to conflicts that are challenging to resolve, since the differences are subtle yet profound, and dealing with differing orientations to similar phenomena (e.g., time, work, relationships), perhaps even using similar vocabulary, of which interactants may not even be aware, much less able to articulate.

<div align="center">*Conflict Behavior*</div>

Cultural factors that exist prior to communication affect interactants' conflict behavior, but there are also separate issues that arise during communication that affect conflict. Two such issues are: (a) conflict styles, and (b) emotion and expression.

Conflict Styles

Conflict styles are an element of conflict behavior that may differ by culture and contribute to interpersonal conflict. As mentioned earlier, conflict style describes a person's general typified response to conflict (Putnam & Poole, 1987), and scholars have become interested in correlations between culture and conflict styles (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Much work in intercultural conflict styles is based on Blake and Mouton's (1964) dual concern model and the resulting five styles: integrating/collaborating,

obliging/accommodating, dominating/competing, avoiding/withdrawing and compromising (Cai & Fink, 2002).

One approach to discerning cultural differences in conflict style is to search for links between general cultural characteristics and certain conflict styles, such as individualism and collectivism. Studies linking individualism and collectivism and conflict style are somewhat inconsistent, but in general collectivists are believed to be non-confrontational and individualists are believed to be more confrontational (Cai & Fink, 2002). This loosely implies that Mexicans, as collectivists, are generally non-confrontational while individualistic U.S. Anglos are confrontational. Indeed, Mexicans are usually characterized as avoidant (Gabrielidis et al., 1997; Kagan, Knight, & Martinez-Romero, 1982; Kim & Leung, 2000).

Specific research involving Mexicans supports the idea that Mexicans tend to be non-confrontational or avoidant, and equally or more concerned with others' outcomes. In a questionnaire-based study (in participants' native language) of 103 college students from a state-funded university in Mexico and 91 college students from a state-funded university in the southwestern United States, Gabrielidis et al. (1997) examined cultural difference in conflict resolution style preference using the dual-concern model. They found that collectivistic Mexicans preferred conflict resolution styles that emphasized concern for the outcomes of others (accommodation and collaboration) to a greater degree than did individualistic U.S. Americans. Both preferred collaboration and accommodation to avoidance and competition, and they did not differ significantly in preferences for the use of competition. Mexicans regarded collaboration, a moderately active style, as descriptive of their approach to interpersonal conflict. Mexicans

demonstrated a strong tendency to avoid conflict, favored accommodation styles, and regarded competition as their least favorite style.

In two studies involving 60 Mexican children in a low-income school in Mexico near the U.S. border and 67 Mexican American and 138 Anglo children in a low-income school in the U.S., Kagan et al. (1982), in their oft-cited study, found that Mexican children rated higher than Mexican American and Anglo children on non-conflict responses. Anglos made more mediated responses to conflict (i.e., tell an authority) than Mexican children, and Mexican Americans were intermediate in mediated conflict responses. Mexican children were least likely to respond directly. The researchers also found that direct conflict responses tended to increase with age for all groups, and differences between U.S. and Mexican children decreased. In other words, Mexican children start off with non-conflict responses and increase both mediated and conflict responses, while U.S. children start off with mediated responses and increase both conflict and non-conflict responses. Interestingly, while Mexican and Mexican American children showed very difference conflict responses researchers found no substantial differences between Anglo and Mexican American children in their conflict responses. The researchers attributed this lack of difference to methodology rather than the influence of mainstream culture or acculturation on the Mexican American children, causing them to behave more like Anglos.

Ethnic identity may be a factor that influences preferred conflict style. Ting-Toomey et al. (2000) compared the effect of "ethnic identity salience," or the importance that an individual gives his or her ethnicity, and "cultural identity salience," or the importance that an individual gives his or her larger (U.S.) culture, on the conflict style of

662 respondents from four U.S. ethnic groups. Seven styles were examined: integrating, compromising, dominating, avoiding, neglecting, emotional expression, and third-party intervention. "Third party" referred to reliance on outside help in dealing with the conflict, "neglect" was the use of passive styles such as passive aggressive anger responses, and "emotional expression" referred to the value of expressing emotion during conflict and using emotions to guide conflict responses. U.S. Latinos with weak cultural identity used neglect more than other ethnic groups regardless of the other groups' cultural identity, perhaps due to the Latino value of *respeto* and wanting to maintain respect, dignity and positive "face" in social situations (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000) by not confronting the other party. Anglos favored integrating styles. While findings on U.S. Latinos' conflict styles may or may not apply to Mexicans, they may suggest similar cultural tendencies.

Preference for certain conflict styles is also affected by "face" and self-construal, which provide additional context to characterizations of Mexicans as avoidant and other-oriented. "Face" is an important concept in avoidant styles and intercultural conflict resolution in general. It refers to " a claimed sense of favorable social self-worth that a person wants others to have of her or him" (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998, p. 187). "Facework" is " a set of communicative behaviors that people use to regulate their social dignity and to support or challenge the other's social dignity" (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998, p. 188). While face and facework are not concepts that apply only to conflict, they may be negotiated or expressed through conflict. How face is defined, and facework enacted, vary among cultures, since the tension between one's social self and personal self are affected by collectivism and individualism, among other aspects of culture.

Mexicans, as collectivists, tend to use more self-effacing strategies than self-enhancing, and show concern for "mutual face" as opposed to solely "other face" or "self face" (Oetzel et al., 2003).

Self-construal also affects conflict styles and may confound or mitigate effects thought to originate in cultural differences. In a questionnaire-based comparison between U.S. Latinos/as and Anglos involving 463 participants from a moderately-sized community college in the western U.S., Oetzel (1998) found that dominating conflict styles are associated with independent self-construals while avoiding, compromising and obliging conflict styles are associated with interdependent self-construals. Integrating conflict styles were found to be strongly associated with interdependent self-construals and weakly associated with independent self-construals. Oetzel (1998) noted that ethnic and cultural background had a slight effect on compromising and integrating styles, and implies that collectivism and interdependence are linked, and individualism and independence are linked, since Latinos preferred compromising and integrating styles more than did Anglos.

While the previous study looked at U.S. Latinos and not specifically Mexicans, other research on face and facework by Oetzel et al. (2003) on conflicts with parents and siblings yielded similar results for Mexicans. They found that individuals with interdependent self construals (including Mexicans) tended to use other-and mutual-face concerns and integrating and avoiding facework behaviors, while those with independent self-construals (including U.S. Americans) preferred self-face and dominating facework. Cultures such as U.S. American culture with individualistic, small power distances used

more self-face and mutual-face than other-face, and employed more dominating and integrating facework, and less avoiding.

Despite tendencies among collectivistic, interdependent Mexicans to prefer integrating or avoidant styles, this does not necessarily mean they are unconcerned about others. Correlational findings in the Gabrielidis et al. (1997) study suggested that for interpersonal conflicts, avoidance might actually reflect a concern for others, rather than a lack of concern for others, as postulated by the dual-concern model. Kim and Leung (2000) agreed that avoidance might not necessarily imply low concern for others, or for self. This assumption about avoidance stems from the perhaps ethnocentric belief that direct confrontation of conflicts is better than indirect styles, and "is taken so much for granted in individualist cultures that is has rarely been stated explicitly" (Kim & Leung, 2000, p. 227). The authors proposed a new model that suggests that collectivists' avoidant tendencies are due to their desire to preserve relational harmony by saving others' face.

Since avoidance does not necessarily imply lower concern for self it other, it can be inferred that groups that prefer avoidant or obliging strategies do not necessarily see such styles as negative (Kim & Leung, 2000; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). In fact, some scholars are already attempting to improve and expand on the dual-concern model. For instance, as mentioned, Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) describe a Culture-Based Situational Conflict Model which integrates individual primary orientation factors (cultural values, personal attributes, conflict norms, and face concerns), situational features (ingroup/outgroup perceptual boundaries, relationship parameters, conflict goal assessments, and conflict intensity and resources), conflict process factors (conflict

styles, emotional expression, facework behaviors and conflict competence skills), and conflict competence criteria and outcomes. While much more complex, such an approach avoids the oversimplifying, reductionist tendencies of dual-axis models. It considers multiple contextual factors beyond simple static, discrete conflict style categories that are assigned value and qualified as good or bad by researchers.

As avoidance does not necessarily indicate low concern, neither does an orientation towards concern for others or mutual face mean that Mexicans are passive or even always avoidant. As discussed earlier, issues such as ethnic identity, self-construal, and communication context come into play (Oetzel, 1998; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). Also, communication judged by an outsider as passive or avoidant may in fact simply be contextual, indirect, subtle, and intended to maintain relationships and harmony (Lindsley & Braithwaite, 1996). Some research suggests that individualist U.S. Americans may, perhaps, be more avoidant than collectivist, collaborative Mexicans – or avoidant for different reasons. According to Markus and Lin (1999), Anglos see conflict as the result of the activities of two individuals interfering with each other. Conflict is regarded as incidental and something to be resolved. Resolution involves separating the people from the conflict, focusing on interests, not positions, generating possibilities before deciding what to do, and insisting that results be based on an objective "logical" standard to eliminate competition between individual wills. As a disruptive phenomenon that interferes with individuals' activities, "conflict in European American contexts is typically seen as a negative situation *to be avoided if at all possible* [emphasis mine], or resolved quickly if unavoidable." (Markus & Lin, 1999, p. 315).

By contrast, in relational Mexican American contexts, reactions to conflict can involve *both* avoidance and confrontation, depending on the stage of the conflict. Conflict resolution should be appropriate to the setting and maintain *individual* pride and honor – an agreement that ensures autonomy or guarantees individual rights is less important (Markus & Lin, 1999). Conflict is regarded as a disagreement between individuals, but characterized as a loss of harmony. Strategies to avoid conflict include facilitating cooperation, controlling negative emotions, and providing information that maintains the relationship, even if it is misleading. "When these avoidance strategies fail and conflict seems inevitable, confrontational discussions occur in Mexican American contexts." (Markus & Lin, 1999, p. 324). *When avoidance fails, confrontation results.* But even within such confrontations, the goal is the *reestablishment of harmony*, and the final goal is a mutual coordination of feelings rather than a formal agreement or "final" resolution. Such a process may or may not be true for Mexicans as well, but regardless, this finding provides a more complete picture of the complexity of possible conflict responses, and the importance of multiple contexts and value orientations in managing conflict.

Emotion and Expression

Emotion and expression/affect are a third aspect of conflict behavior. Emotionality and self-expression in communication is especially important for Mexicans across genders. In their dated, but unique and oft-cited study conducted 30 years ago on interpersonal conflict between middle-class males in Guadalajara and Michigan, McGinn, Harburg, and Ginsburg (1973) found that the Mexican male self-concept "is more deeply based on emotional relations than his American counterpart" (p. 105). Mexicans have a

relational focus, rather than a material or achievement-oriented focus like U.S. Americans, and care more about treatment received from ingroup members than outgroup members.

In the McGinn et al. (1973) study, Mexican men appeared to trust friends and the relationship more, and were more willing to fight for a threatened friendship, than U.S. American men. U.S. American men were more willing to lose a friendship to keep other goals or self-concepts intact, since their self image was more dependent on external factors. Accordingly, U.S. American men were more upset by criticism coming from a stranger than were Mexican men. Mexican men were more upset by another's denial of their personal qualities than by criticism of acquired skills, especially since only trusted intimates would be in a position to judge personal qualities. U.S. American men showed the opposite. Conflict in general was found to be more disruptive to U.S. American men's friendships overall. These results suggest marked differences in how Mexican and U.S. Anglo men perceive, value and fight for their relationships, and the different impact of conflict on those relationships.

Summary

In summary, during conflict, Mexicans are usually thought of as non-confrontational and conflict avoidant, while U.S. Americans or Anglos are conceptualized as confrontational. Research supports the notion that while Mexicans tend to be more concerned with other- and mutual-face preservation than U.S. Americans/Anglos, both groups prefer collaborative or accommodating styles in interpersonal conflict, with Mexicans preferring these styles slightly more. U.S.

Americans tend to prefer dominating and competitive styles more than do Mexicans, although they prefer integrating styles more overall.

Contrary to common characterizations, the avoidant style is not necessarily passive, nor a demonstration of lack of concern for self or other as suggested by the dual-concern model; it is about demonstrating high concern for self, other and harmony ("mutual face"). There is some support for the idea that Anglos are actually more averse to conflict and view it as more negative and disruptive than do relational Mexicans who view conflict as a normal, inevitable byproduct of essential relationships. The one consistent finding is that neither U.S. Americans/Anglos nor Mexicans prefer dominating styles and both interpret this style somewhat negatively.

Despite some similarities in conflict behavior, particularly preference for certain conflict styles, Mexicans and U.S. Americans differ in the priorities they place on relationships, and in their views of the role and nature of conflict in relationships. Mexicans seem to value the emotional element of relationships and self-expression more than U.S. American Anglos. Mexican men appear to be more emotionally invested in their friendships, more willing to fight for them, and more averse to criticism from close friends and denial of their personal qualities than U.S. American men. Different priorities and views such as these may create tensions in intercultural encounters and even lead to conflict.

Beyond similarities and differences between Mexicans and U.S. Americans during conflict, this review emphasizes the fact that more research needs to be done with Mexicans, and specifically on what occurs *during* conflict, particularly with U.S. Americans. Many of these studies looked at Mexican Americans, and most were cross-

cultural comparisons of various styles, not examinations of the intercultural dynamic. Also, once again, with the exception of the Culture-Based Situational Conflict Model (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001), the preponderance of research on conflict styles is focused on a few discrete "types" that may fail to adequately incorporate matters of context, situation, identity, change, and all possible responses.

<div align="center">*Consequences of Conflict*</div>

The process of relational conflict does not only involve antecedents that create and frame the conflict, nor just the behaviors that take place during a conflict. Apart from the cultural context existing prior and the dynamic occurring during, conflict also involves the end results, or consequences. In intercultural and cross-cultural communication, two major consequences of interpersonal conflict are communication competence and communication satisfaction.

Communication Competence

As mentioned, behavior seen as competent is both effective and appropriate (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Competent communication is therefore communication that is seen as effective and appropriate, and what is considered competent communication may vary between cultures and affect the way conflict resolution is defined and obtained. Collier et al. (1986) noted that competent communication is the means by which cultural identities are negotiated and reinforced, and stated that cultural difference in competencies is a research area that needs more attention. In their research on the functionality of intracultural communication among three major U.S. ethnic groups (Anglos, Mexican Americans and African Americans), they found five outcome

categories: self-validation, relational validation, cultural validation, being understood, and goal accomplishment.

Self-validation involved confirmation of self-concept and acceptance of feelings and opinions, and was the most frequently mentioned category for all groups, although Anglos mentioned it proportionally more often. All groups mentioned acceptance of feelings and opinions more often than validation of self-concept. Relational validation was the second most frequently mentioned category for all groups and included confirmation of the maintenance or development of the relationship, with Mexican Americans second in relative percentage after African Americans. Only Mexican Americans cited cultural validation, or a feeling that one's worldview and values are accepted and shared, as important, which is similar to Hecht et al.'s (1990) finding on the Mexican American value of worldview. Goal attainment was an outcome only with Anglos (Collier et al., 1986).

Once again, there are major similarities between Anglos and Mexican Americans: both value self-validation and relational validation. However, Anglos place more emphasis on self-validation and goals while Mexican Americans value relational and cultural validation more. Collier's (1991) later work on conflict competence in intracultural friendships among members of various U.S. ethnic groups corroborated these findings. While both groups had similar definitions of close friendship, Anglos emphasized freedom in expression of *ideas* while Mexican Americans emphasized support and expression of *feelings* – they emphasized the relationship.

Martin, Hammer, and Bradford (1994) explored the effect of context on Latino and non-Latino expectations for communication competence among university students.

They identified four nonverbal categories of competence (approachability, poise, attentiveness, and touch) and four verbal (language adaptability, cultural topics, inclusion, and assertiveness). Latinos reported that poise and approachability were more important in intracultural task and intercultural social contexts, while European Americans felt these categories were the opposite: more important in intracultural social and intercultural task contexts.

Bradford, Meyers, and Kane (1999) attempted to corroborate and elaborate these findings, and identify other communication competence behaviors emic to Latinos, using a focus group method involving five focus groups of university students with a combined total of 18 participants. Their findings supported the categories set forth by Martin et al. (1994). Language adaptability was particularly strong, especially in terms of deciding which language, or combination of languages, is most appropriate in an interaction. "Cultural topics," such as determining the ethnicity of the other Latino interactants, also emerged as important to adjust communication, show interest and identify commonalities. However, no significant difference was found between intercultural and intracultural contexts for any of the categories. Also, a new category, "job completion" emerged in which participants saw social and task situations as different, and that social involvement would follow task completion. This finding contradicts other findings that Latinos tend not to separate task and social modes, and give priority to social situations over task. However, Bradford et al. (1999) noted that this result may have come from stereotypes about the expectations vis-à-vis a Japanese interactant.

All the above studies dealt with Mexican Americans or Latinos, and not Mexicans, so the findings may or may not apply to Mexicans. Only one study did look at

Mexican perceptions of communication competence. Johnson et al. (2002) posed the question: "Which communication behaviors differentiate perceptions of communication competence among Anglo Americans, Hispanic Americans, Spaniards, Chileans and Mexicans?" In a questionnaire study of 458 participants that were faculty or students at various universities in the U.S., Spain, Chile, and Mexico, they found that Hispanic and Anglo perceptions of competence were similar. Both deemed nonverbal behavior such as touch, interpersonal inclusion, "proper" language use and attentiveness as important regardless of context. In fact, Anglos and Hispanic Americans had more in common with each other than with the other three groups. Results suggest caution when generalizing perceptions of competent communication behavior from Hispanic Americans to other non-U.S. American Hispanic cultures, and from one non-U.S. American Hispanic culture to another. The researchers concluded that qualitative methods should reveal additional competence behaviors and explanations for the reasons for competence (Johnson et al., 2002).

Lindsley and Braithwaite (1996) emphasized that the main challenge for U.S. Americans in intercultural competence with Mexicans is the process of adopting more of an "other" orientation, but noted that this may result in discomfort and intrapersonal conflict for the U.S. American. Therefore, they suggested that becoming interculturally competent might require an ongoing dialectic between "self" and "other" orientations. They concluded, "future research is needed to examine the extent to which ascribed cultural identities influence communication competencies in intercultural communication." (p. 218).

Communication Satisfaction

Communication satisfaction is an emotion that interactants experience when communication events meet or fail to meet their expectations (Hecht, 1978), and is an especially salient result of effective interpersonal communication (Hecht & Ribeau, 1984). The presence or lack of communication satisfaction as a result of conflict may signal whether a conflict was successfully managed or resolved, and how long the resolution lasts. In intimate intercultural relationships especially, communication satisfaction may be an important factor in relationship maintenance and stability.

In a questionnaire survey of 589 Hispanic, Anglo and African American volunteers from introductory speech classes at a Los Angeles university, Hecht and Ribeau (1984) found that ethnic differences accounted for 25% of the variance in satisfying communication; a moderate but important effect. Groups may be aligned along two continua that measure satisfaction: (a) internal source of rewards and self-interest subsumed to relationship, and (b) external, self-oriented rewards. Hispanics were closer to the first dimension, Anglos closer to the second. Hispanic satisfaction revolved around nonverbal communication and acceptance of self, while Anglos stressed the future of the relationship and needing explicit confirmation that the message and the relationship are accepted and "that they are going in the same direction as well as the feeling that similar conversations will repeat in the future" (Hecht & Ribeau, 1984, p. 147). Again, while this research was conducted with Mexican Americans and not Mexicans, it may still offer some insight into differences between Mexicans and U.S. Americans, in the absence of any literature on Mexican communication satisfaction or intercultural satisfaction between U.S. Americans and Mexicans.

Summary

There appear to be similarities between U.S. Americans and Mexicans in what elements constitute competent and satisfying communication, and the importance of appropriate nonverbal behavior, but there are also differences in matters of degree, priority and context. Although Mexican Americans and Anglos may have more in common with regards to competent communication standards than either group and Mexicans, Mexican Americans tend to emphasize internal relational and cultural issues while Anglos emphasize individual and external personal needs, goals, and a sense of progress. These differences may cause or exacerbate conflict in that either group may seem inattentive to, or uncaring about, the other's needs or expectations during an interaction.

Review of Mexican Literature

A researcher conducting a study in Mexico with Mexican participants, especially a researcher looking for local/emergent meanings, would be remiss to ignore literature published in Mexico on the research topic. Even while in the United States, I began to make contacts via e-mail, and consult Mexican databases, most of which employed U.S. databases I had already reviewed (e.g., Academic Search Premier, Wilson Web, JSTOR). While my search yielded little, I describe my procedure and limited findings here.

I began by emailing a couple of scholars, and the library at the Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM) in Mexico City. Contacts suggested three female sociologists, but none of these turned out to have done any research relevant to my specific topic. Upon arriving in Guadalajara, I consulted with the two scholars in the city known to have done any kind of work in intercultural communication: Dr. Enrique

Sánchez Ruíz at the Universidad de Guadalajara, and Dr. Raúl Fuentes Navarro at ITESO (Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores del Occidente). While interested in my project and very accommodating, they had little to suggest. Dr. Sánchez confirmed what I already suspected: *lo intercultural interpersonal es casi inexistente aquí en México* ["[research] which is intercultural and interpersonal is almost nonexistent here in Mexico"] (E. Sánchez Ruíz, personal communication, December 18, 2003). Dr. Fuentes concurred, and doubted I would find any pertinent literature (R. Fuentes Navarro, personal communication, December 19, 2003).

In Mexico, the communication field, while very international in orientation, is primarily focused on *comunicaciones* ["communications"], or mass media and technology. Nevertheless, I conducted an extensive search, using various keywords in English and Spanish, of electronic databases managed by the Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara (UAG) and ITESO. Since electronic academic databases in Mexico are not as complete or well developed as their counterparts in the United States, I also perused numerous hard copy indexes in the main UAG library. Most of the journals that seemed to deal with relevant subject matter were in the fields of psychology and sociology. I consulted lists of all of 17 different journals' articles published in at least the last two years, and some into the 1990s and early 1980s. Two journals seemed especially promising: *Enseñanza e Investigación en Psicología* [" Teaching and Research in Psychology"] and *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicología* ["Latin American Journal of Pyschology"], the latter of which is also available in the U.S. However, while interesting, most of what seemed to be relevant articles were not, dealing with topics such as migration to the United States, education, language, cross-cultural comparisons of

psychological traits, general U.S.-Mexico relations, social change, identity and sociocultural representations.

There were two exceptions. Rivera Aragón and Díaz Loving (2002) conducted a quantitative study in which four scales were applied to 627 married Mexican couples: a semantic differential measuring power style; the Love Styles Inventory; a scale to measure various behaviors; and a marital satisfaction instrument. They found that positive love styles and behaviors (e.g., intimacy, affiliation behaviors, agreement) increased satisfaction, while negative power styles (e.g., manipulation, imposition, coercion, blackmail) reduced it. Hutchison et al. (2003) examined conflicts in mixed-faith marriages via open-ended questionnaires sent by email. The 15 respondents, including six couples, were of six different faiths and various nationalities. Results indicated that such marriages experienced conflict primarily from differences in ritual (over topics like circumcision, in what place to get married, and to what school to send the children) and relationship (with one's spouse or with extended family members).

While both of these articles are marginally relevant to the study of conflict in Mexican-U.S. American marriages, I conclude that no studies have been done in Mexico on interpersonal communication in mixed marriage, intercultural conflict in couples, nor intercultural conflict in interpersonal relationships, much less on the specific topic of intercultural marital conflict in Mexican-U.S. American couples. My project may therefore be of interest and benefit to Mexican scholars as well as those in the United States.

Conclusion

While there is sufficient research to provide some background on cross-cultural communication and intercultural conflict between U.S. Americans and Mexicans, there is no examination of communication or conflict between U.S. American-Mexican marital partners in literature in either Mexico or the United States. There is also little connection between the U.S. literature on romantic relational conflict and intercultural conflict, other than similar concerns with conflict styles, and little overlap that is relevant to conflict between U.S. American-Mexican marital partners

This review of literature illustrates several important points relevant to this study. First, intimate relationships provide a special context for intercultural conflict, and such conflict manifests differently in these relationships than in other types. Second, antecedents to conflict, such as gender and differing cultural values, may provide a unique context to intercultural conflict between Mexican and U.S. American marital partners that must be examined to understand what follows. Third, behavior during conflict may be affected by preference for different conflict styles, attachment styles, issues such as physical aggression, and the role of emotion and expression in relationships and during conflict. Fourth, consequences of conflict such as communication or conflict competence, and communication or relationship satisfaction must be considered in determining whether conflict leads to resolution, whether it lasts, and the effect of conflict on relationships and their duration overall.

Finally, while many similarities appear to exist between U.S. Americans and Mexicans, particularly in regards to conflict styles and conflict consequences, there are

many differences, especially in cultural values. Furthermore, what appear to be similarities may in fact be differences in definition, degree and priority that significantly affect how conflict between members of the tow groups play out. However, to date, no study has examined what occurs between U.S. Americans and Mexicans *during* intercultural conflict, much less conflict between U.S. American and Mexican marital partners.

Given that there is relatively little research on Mexican-U.S. American interpersonal communication, none specifically on Mexican-U.S. American intercultural conflict, and none on conflict communication in marital relationships between Mexicans and U.S. Americans, the present study aims to begin to fill this gap in the literature, and discover some of the dynamics at work in this relationship to better individuals' lives. The principal question guiding this endeavor is therefore broad and inductive in nature:

RQ1: How do U.S. American and Mexican marital partners perceive and

describe the ways they manage interpersonal conflict with each other?

Although there is a sociological or psychological bent to this research question, it is an adequate question for a communication study because conflict is a communication process and behavior. Participants' understanding, perception, and description of conflict are communication processes, and informed by communication processes. Communication as a human behavioral phenomenon is also inherently interdisciplinary.

The principal question inspires three sub-questions that expand on the principal question:

RQ1a: What are the principal issues or antecedents that create and frame

interpersonal conflict between U.S. American and Mexican marital partners?

RQ1b: What are the different strategies employed by U.S. American and Mexican

marital partners in managing interpersonal conflict with each other?

RQ1c: What are the consequences of interpersonal conflict for U.S. American

and Mexican marital partners?

While these research questions are informed by existing literature, to my knowledge they

have not been directly posed or addressed by any of the current studies. Now that I have

described my research intent focus, I turn to the methods I utilized to answering the

questions.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

In communication research, scholars work with a variety of methods depending on their purpose and the nature of the phenomenon examined. Given the gaps in both the intercultural conflict and romantic relational conflict literature concerning U.S. American and Mexican marital partners, I conducted an exploratory interview-based study designed to address the three research questions by asking participants about antecedents to conflict, conflict behavior and consequences of conflict. The following is a detailed description of the research methods I applied. In the following sections, I describe the methods and rationale, sampling, data collection procedures, role of researcher, and data analysis.

Methods and Rationale

While there exists adequate work in intercultural conflict, romantic relational conflict, and communication among and between Mexicans and U.S. Americans to provide a basis for this study, as demonstrated in the literature review, there is no research in the specific area of U.S. American-Mexican marital conflict communication, and therefore no salient theories to test. Quantitative research methods usually involve the testing of some existing theory through initial assertions and assumptions (Williams & Monge, 2001), so such an approach was inadequate for my exploratory purpose. A qualitative method that allowed flexibility, exploration, and an inductive mode of reasoning (which encourages theory development during and after data collection),

seemed to be the better choice. Such a method seemed the best choice for breaching an

understudied topic such as U.S. American-Mexican marital conflict.

My methodological approach was therefore that of grounded theory. According

to Strauss and Corbin (1990), grounded theory "is inductively derived from the study of

the phenomenon it represents" (p. 23), and entails a reciprocal, organic process of data

collection, analysis and theory development. A well-developed grounded theory must

adequately meet four criteria: fit, understanding, generality, and control (Glaser &

Strauss, 1967). A grounded theory *approach* is similarly inductive, using "a systematic

set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a

phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). Although it is a scientific method that

incorporates traditional research canons, it is a particularly creative one, which lends

itself to new interpretations and definitions. Grounded theory is particularly well suited

to examine phenomena or relationships that are understudied or poorly developed

(Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory research questions are therefore broad, as are

mine, and become more focused during the course of the research process.

A grounded theory approach with a naturalistic, local/emergent orientation is a

qualitative approach, and therefore best pursued with a qualitative method. One type of

qualitative method would be some form of self-report by study co-researchers. As Oetzel

et al. (2001) and Putnam and Poole (1987) point out, questionnaires, a common

quantitative self-report method, can be limiting, especially in studying conflict, because

they rely on a respondent's memory recall and may not be entirely accurate

representations of behavior. However, a method that relies on self-report is indicated,

because, although interpersonal intercultural conflict is a naturally occurring

communication phenomenon, it would be impractically time-consuming to wait for sufficient incidences of spontaneous conflict to occur in the researcher's presence. It would also be unethical to induce people to conflict for research purposes, and such an approach may produce artificial reactions. Interviewing is an effective technique to gather information about phenomena that cannot be effectively observed in other ways, and is also an effective way to gain understanding of emic conceptualizations of communication and meaning (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Therefore, field interviewing is the method of choice, combined with informal participant observation of participants interacting during the interview.

Field interviewing, particularly open-ended and semi-structured interviewing, has strengths that fit the purpose of this study. Lindlof (1995) conceptualized field interviewing as eliciting participants' rhetorical construction of their socially situated experience. McCracken (1988) described interviews as one of the more powerful, revealing qualitative research tools, which "gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves" (p. 9). In-depth interviews are meant to gain textured, detailed understanding of others' experience, and semi-structured interviews afford both the interviewer and interviewee sufficient flexibility to allow the interviewee's story to come forth. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer follows a guide or protocol, but may ask non-scripted follow-up questions and probe participants' answers, and the interviewee is provided a great deal of control through the open nature of the scripted questions (Fontana & Frey, 1994). The goal of this method is the same as mine: not to obtain answers to questions, test hypotheses or "evaluate" a phenomenon in the traditional sense, but to pursue "an interest in

understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 1998, p. 3). Ultimately, interviewing is about hearing and understanding others' perspectives and stories, illuminating events and interactions that cannot be directly observed, and the meaning-making process that these interactions represent. Interviewing also captures the context of this meaning-making by allowing the researcher to directly observe participants' distinctive communication style, language and nonverbal behavior in a somewhat natural setting (Lindlof, 2002; Seidman, 1998).

<div align="center">Study Participants</div>

To obtain a relatively representative sample of Mexicans, it made more sense to interview people from the interior of Mexico and not the U.S.-Mexico border region. While the borderlands are an important geographic, cultural and socioeconomic space, their culture, and the intersections that take place there, are not necessarily representative of Mexico due to its history and unique juxtaposition of nations and cultures (Gibbs, 2001; Martínez, 1994). While no one region can be fairly said to represent all of Mexico, I felt it would be most informative to obtain participants from a region that is more culturally and distinctively "Mexican" to accentuate U.S. American and Mexican cultural differences. It also made sense to interview urban Mexicans, since urban Mexican culture increasingly influences Mexican culture overall (at almost 22 million inhabitants, the metropolitan area of the capital, Mexico City, is the second most populous city in the world [Brinkhoff, 2003] and home to one-fifth the nation's 97.5 million people [INEGI, 2003]) and therefore influences the intersection between U.S. Americans and Mexicans. Also, most contact between U.S. Americans and Mexicans occur chiefly in urban settings on both sides of the border, since this is where both populations cluster.

The city of Guadalajara, Jalisco, therefore provided an ideal place to obtain participants. As Mexico's second-largest city at just over five million, it is definitely urban but without the unique culture and problems of Mexico City. Birthplace of mariachi music, tequila and *charreada* rodeos, Guadalajara's culture is commonly regarded as quintessentially Mexican, and a unique blend of European and indigenous ethnicities, colonial past and religious history (Martínez Réding, 1987a, 1987b). Combined with nearby communities of Chapala and Ajijíc, the metropolitan area of Guadalajara is home to what is said to be one of the largest communities of U.S. expatriates in the world, numbering approximately 50,000 (Sra. Emerson, U.S. Consulate General Guadalajara Public Affairs, personal communication, December 30, 2003; U.S. Consulate General Guadalajara, n.d.). The interactions between this (primarily middle-to upper-class Anglo) community and the wider Mexican population are somewhat separate, but relatively harmonious. Therefore, the Guadalajara area was likely to yield several participants as well as provide a welcome backdrop for a study of this nature.

Access and consent are crucial elements in the interview process that set the tone for the conversations to follow. Especially in a relationship-oriented culture such as Mexico, it was especially vital that I obtain the help of credible "gatekeepers" that could introduce me to suitable participants (Marín & Marín, 1991). I lived in Guadalajara from 1997 through 1999 and have maintained relationships and made frequent visits to the area since 1993. This facilitated the recruitment of participants, since I already knew seven U.S. American or British-Mexican couples residing in Guadalajara that could serve as initial contacts. Three of my acquaintances are well connected in the U.S. expatriate community in Guadalajara through the American School and various business ventures,

and I have several Mexican acquaintances and contacts in universities and major companies throughout Guadalajara that work with or know U.S. foreign nationals. I used all these contacts to actively recruit study participants.

In a qualitative method such as field interviewing, random sampling, a feature of quantitative methods intended to increase reliability, is sacrificed for depth. The most common forms of obtaining samples are more purposeful or strategic (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) such as convenience, snowball, and volunteer sampling. I employed convenience sampling by inviting two of my acquaintances to participate in the research. I used snowball and volunteer sampling by utilizing my relationships to recruit participants, and by asking participants to recommend others for the study. My primary means of recruitment was e-mail, although I also made a few phone calls and created a bilingual flyer that I distributed via e-mail (See Appendix A). Participants were offered no incentive to participate other than a copy of the study results. Indeed, no additional incentives seemed to be necessary since this topic proved to be of great interest to intercultural couples, particularly U.S. American wives. This interest, the satisfaction of helping a friend (me, or the gatekeeper that referred the participant), and the insight participants gained from the interview process proved to be more than sufficient compensation.

In terms of the number of participants needed, Seidman (1998) recommended "sufficiency" and "saturation" as criteria for determining this number. Saturation means that an interviewer needs to continue to interview participants until he or she is not hearing any new themes. Sufficiency refers to the reasonable representativeness of the participants; that is, whether they represent the necessary range of traits. Seidman (1998)

recommends maximum variation sampling to obtain the widest possible gamut of traits in the sample. My goal was to recruit eight-to-twelve married heterosexual couples in which one partner self-identifies as U.S. American and the other as Mexican. Participants had to have been married at least one year, have children or not, and be of any socioeconomic class or profession.

Participant Demographics

I recruited a total of eight couples to participate in the interviews. Despite the small size of the sample, it was a diverse group. One of the participants had been a coworker I had also seen occasionally in social settings while I lived in Guadalajara. One other participant was a professional contact I knew superficially and had never met in person. The rest were recruited by a friend of mine who works in the American School of Guadalajara. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 62, but most were in their 30s or 40s. Two of the couples had been married just two or three years, two for thirty years or more, and the rest between six and seventeen years. Most of the couples had been together for about two years before marriage, and half of their pre-marriage relationships involved maintaining a long-distance romance. All the couples had one-to-three children or stepchildren, except one couple that was expecting their first child. All the couples had lived for the majority of their marriage in Guadalajara. Participants' professions included business owner, teacher/educator, secretarial/administrative, musician, scuba diving instructor, economist, accountant, translator, and computing/information science. There was also a range of personalities; I perceived some participants as very verbal, articulate, social, and gregarious, while others were less verbal, more reserved, and less immediate or clear in their responses.

Half the Mexican participants were born and raised in Guadalajara, and two were from the Mexico City area. The other two were born elsewhere (Laredo, Texas and Veracruz), but spent most of their adolescence and/or adulthood in Guadalajara. All self-identified as Mexican. While the U.S. Americans were originally from various regions of the United States, most were from the Midwest, followed by the northeastern U.S. Three of the U.S. Americans had non-mainstream Anglo identities. One native New Mexican self-identified as Hispanic, and one biracial Anglo-Mexican participant self-identified as Mexican American, American or White. Both of these participants had Anglo surnames, Hispanic/Latino facial features and medium complexions. The third participant was blue-eyed and very fair, but self-identified as "Hispana" because her father and grandmother were Spanish, and due to her political beliefs. Participants' range of language ability varied from full fluency in English and Spanish to very limited bilingualness, but no participant was completely monolingual in either language. The primary language of five relationships was English, while Spanish was the primary language in the other three.

Six of the couples were U.S. American women married to Mexican men; the other two were Mexican women married to U.S. American men. The group was decidedly middle class; a couple of the participants were from a lower middle class, but most were middle class or affluent. I determined class level based on participants' dress, location and characteristics of their residence, speech patterns, education level, and by directly asking them how they would classify themselves. The regions of the city that the participants resided in reflected their social and economic class, clustering in typically middle class or affluent neighborhoods. All but one had college degrees, and eight had graduate degrees including two with PhDs. Six of the couples had at least one partner

working at the American School, and one other couple had one partner working as a teacher.

<div align="center">Data Collection Procedures</div>

For this study, I was the only researcher. While having multiple researchers in an interview study can contribute to the credibility of results, this may alter the interpersonal dynamic with the participants, and complicate the analysis and interpretation of the data due to the additional perspective(s) (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In designing an effective study, care should be taken in planning how the data is collected. Even with in-depth, semi-structured interviews, attention must be paid to the questions the researcher asks each participant to ensure the research questions are adequately addressed, and to provide some uniformity to responses. The procedures of the interview process must also be clarified to provide structure and safety to participants and researcher alike. In the following sections, I describe both the interview protocol and interview procedures.

Interview Protocol

Like an agenda, an interview protocol provides structure for an interview. It contains the interview questions, but also orientational information that the researcher uses to begin and situate the interview. Ideally, interviews should start with a brief orientation and the building of rapport, particularly through the asking of basic biographical questions. The interview questions should "unpack" research questions and be worded in an open-ended, neutral, non-leading, genuinely inquisitive fashion that allows the participant to tell his or her story. Attention should be given to the language and terminology used in the questions as well, to ensure their appropriateness and understandability. In my case, I paid particular attention to the wording around "conflict"

since "conflict" is a loaded word, especially among Mexicans who may be reticent to admit, much less describe, conflict situations with their mate. Interview questions are meant to be a guide and provide structure, but not rigidity; the qualitative researcher is wise to stay open to what occurs in interviews, even if it is unexpected, and counter to any of the researcher's preconceived notion (Lindlof, 1995; Seidman, 1998). (See Appendix B for a copy of the biographical information sheet, and Appendices C and D for the couples interview protocols, in English and Spanish, respectively).

I planned to conduct the interviews in whatever language was most comfortable for the interviewees, switching and adapting as necessary. I devised two interview protocols, one in English and one in Spanish. Staying flexible and incorporating language as a factor in the interviews not only provided the interviewees with additional comfort and natural context, but I hoped it would also yield interesting information about the role and use of language in intercultural conflict. Since Spanish is my second language, prior to conducting the interviews I verified the translation of the protocol questions with a native Spanish speaker, to ensure maximum similarity between the English and Spanish versions.

As mentioned in an earlier section, the interviews were intended to be semi-structured, which means that specific questions were asked in each interview, but the exact order of the questions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) and the nature and degree of follow-up "probing" questions varied (Fontana & Frey, 1994) to elicit answers and insights as fully and completely as possible. Since the main purpose was to determine how U.S. American and Mexican marital partners perceive and describe the ways they successfully resolve interpersonal conflict with each other, open-ended questions were

designed to elicit genuine responses about the antecedents, behavior and consequences of conflict.

The following are the specific protocol questions in English, with comments explaining their purpose, and linking them to the research questions:

1. Tell me about your relationship: How did you meet? How long have you been together?

    This is an opening, rapport-building question designed to provide context to what follows.

2. Do you have disagreements/arguments/challenges in your relationship? How often? Do these lead to conflict?

    This question also provides context and background, specifically for the role of conflict in the relationship. The various terms were intended to cover the full gamut of possibilities and participants' language.

3. Is there a difference between a "disagreement," an "argument" and a "conflict"?

    This question was meant to determine the language the participants use to conceptualize conflict, and to get at the nuances of such language. It was also meant to determine which term participants preferred in order to mirror their preferences and conceptualizations in subsequent questions, and to make the questions as non-threatening and least-language dependent as possible.

4. Tell me about a typical conflict/disagreement/argument.

    a. What caused it? How did you manage it? Was it resolved? How?

    This statement-like question elicited a critical incident that helps the respondents start to think about conflict in their relationship, and provides a concrete example

that respondents and I can refer back to later as an example. It is also a "mini tour" (Seidman, 1998) question, designed to give an overview of all three aspects of the research question: conflict antecedents, behavior and consequences.

5. <u>Tell me about a time you resolved a conflict/disagreement/argument.</u>

    a. <u>How did you resolve it? Is this typical?</u>

    b. <u>Explore a conflict/disagreement/argument that was *not* resolved.</u>

This was another critical incident "mini tour" question that aimed to add depth to following questions, and provide more information about "successful" conflict resolution.

6. <u>Tell me what usually causes conflicts/disagreements/arguments between you.</u>
This specifically addresses RQ1a (antecedents).

7. <u>What usually happens during conflicts/disagreements/arguments</u>?
This question specifically addresses RQ1b (behavior).

8. <u>What usually happens *after* conflicts/disagreements/arguments</u>?
This addresses RQ1c (consequences).

9. <u>How is your relationship like other couples you know</u>?
This question aimed to elicit similarities and differences these couples perceive in their relationship vis-à-vis other intercultural couples as well as intracultural couples, to determine what issues respondent couples perceive as being unique to their relationship due to its intercultural nature, if any. The question's focus on similarities was meant to begin to wrap up the interview on a positive, non conflict-focused note.

10. <u>Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your relationship?</u>

This final question is intended to allow respondents to add anything essential about their relationship and conflict resolution that was not covered by earlier questions, as well as bring the interview to a close.

Following the couples interview, I interviewed each individual separately on a different day. Although Seidman (1998) recommended conducting three interviews for each participant, this was not feasible in this study for logistical reasons. I no longer reside in Guadalajara, and Mexican culture is one in which appointments are often rescheduled. The follow-up interview provided participants with an opportunity to add to or clarify anything they said in the joint interview, after having had time for reflection. It also provided them with a chance to share other thoughts and feelings that they may not have felt comfortable saying in front of their partner. This was particularly important for Mexicans who, culturally, are concerned with family appearances and saving "other" and mutual face (Lindsley & Braithwaite, 1996). The follow-up interview also allowed me an opportunity to clarify or follow up on earlier comments or behaviors from the joint interview that seemed unclear, inconsistent, or intriguing.

The individual interviews also followed a protocol, which follows, in English with explanatory comments (See Appendices E and F for the individual interview protocols, in English and Spanish, respectively):

1. <u>Do you have anything you want to tell me that you didn't talk about during our first interview?</u>

2. <u>Is there anything you want to change or clarify about what you said in our first interview? Anything you want to add?</u>

These questions gave participants a chance to modify previous answers after reflection, add information they thought was lacking, or share things they did not feel comfortable expressing during the join interview.

3. <u>What do you think is the main challenge you face in communicating with your partner? What is easiest about communicating with your partner?</u>

4. <u>What do you think is the main source of most of the disagreements/arguments/conflicts in your relationship? [Race/ethnicity? Gender? Culture? Class? Education level? Something else?]</u>

    These two questions were meant to complete the overall picture of marital conflict and communication with one's partner, particularly antecedents, from the point of view of each separate partner.

5. <u>Are you able to resolve your disagreements/arguments/conflicts with your partner effectively most of the time? Why or why not</u>?

    This question aimed to determine the perceived effectiveness of the couple's conflict resolution strategies.

6. <u>How do you identify yourself racially? Ethnically? What is your nationality</u>?

7. <u>How do other people usually identify you – racially? Ethnically? Nationality</u>?

    These questions elicited identity issues that situated each participant in a more complete cultural context.

8. <u>Is there anything else you would like to say</u>?

    This final, open-ended question was meant to wrap up the interview and give the participant an opportunity to add anything else he or she felt was lacking.

Interview Procedures

Four aspects of the actual interview process are important for conducting successful field interviews: gaining consent, the interview environment, recording issues, and interview debriefing (Keyton, 2001; Seidman, 1998). Attending to the details of each ensures maximum comfort for the interviewer and participants, easier analysis of data, and improved credibility and resonance of results. I attend to each of these matters in this section.

I made initial contact with study participants via e-mail by sending messages to e-mail addresses provided by the person making the referral. I described the study and my dates of availability in Guadalajara, and answered any questions. Sometimes a potential participant was interested but unable to interest or convince her mate (these were always women); other times the couple was not available during the study period. I set appointments via e-mail or phone call upon arriving in Guadalajara, and always called before an appointment to confirm, answer any final questions, and get directions to the interview location.

All interviews took place in Guadalajara between December 16, 2003 and January 8, 2004 during the Christmas and New Year holiday. This period was selected because although it is often a period of heavy travel for vacationing Mexicans, and a prime time for expatriates to visit home, it was a convenient time for me. Also, many participants employed in education were on vacation, and therefore more available for interviews. Third, many couples experience conflict around the holidays, so I thought it would be a good time for fresh insights and incidents. Like U.S. Hispanics, Mexicans can be wary of researchers and untrusting of strangers, which means that researchers

must establish legitimacy and trust (Marín & Marín, 1991). While three-to four-weeks may not seem to be a sufficient amount to build the necessary trust with participants, my relationship network and established community credibility counteracted the relatively short amount of data collection time. I also compensated for the relatively short data collection period by contacting participants and establishing some initial rapport prior to arriving in Guadalajara.

Convenience and comfort for the participants guided my choice of interview location, although I told participants I preferred to meet them in their homes. I believed that conducting the interviews in the participants' homes would add to their comfort, familiarity and safety, and provide possible memory cues. It would also provide me with additional nonverbal and contextual information. All initial couples interviews took place in the participants' homes, usually during weekday evenings and weekends, at a time that was convenient for them. During the initial interview, I spent some time chatting informally with the couple, admiring their holiday decorations, for instance, and enjoying any beverage and/or refreshments that were offered. I also met all the couples' children except for those who were grown and out of the area. When the time came to begin, I re-explained the study's purpose, answered questions, and had the participants complete the informed consent forms (See Appendices G and H for the forms in English and Spanish, respectively). I then filled out the biographical information sheet (Appendix B), using the questions as context, to set the tone, and to get the dialogue going.

I continued by asking participants for permission to audio record the interview. The issue of audio recording is a vital one for field interviewing (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Seidman, 1998). Audio recording allows a researcher to capture the details of a

participant's narrative, and subtle nuances of word choice, voice inflection, tone, and language use. All participants consented to be recorded, and I also took detailed notes during the interviews of what was said, as well as field notes (both during and immediately following the interviews) on nonverbal behavior that would not be caught on tape, and other cues such as clothing and the home environment. I assured participants, both verbally and through the consent form, that my notes and recordings would be kept confidential, and that recordings would be destroyed in a year. I reiterated this confidentiality issue before the individual interviews, assuring participants I would not share their responses with their spouses, nor with the third party that referred the participants to me.

There was a minimum of one day to two weeks lapse between the couple interviews and the individual interviews. I told couples the initial interview would last 60 to 90 minutes. They lasted between 45 and 100 minutes in length; most lasted 70 to 80 minutes. All the couples' interviews took place in English and Spanish to varying degrees; most were primarily in one language with words, phrases, expressions and a few sentences in the other language, while two were almost completely bilingual, with each partner speaking his or her native language to me. The individual interviews were conducted at the participants' home or workplace – wherever was convenient and comfortable for them – and one was conducted over the phone. They lasted 10 to 45 minutes in length, and most were about 20 to 30 minutes in length. The individual interviews were all conducted in the participant's native language, with the exception of one Mexican participant who also spoke a lot of English.

At the end of all interviews, I conducted a short debrief to "check in" with participants about how they felt about the interview. Field interviews should generally conclude with a short debrief to handle any concerns or reasonable questions that the interviewee might have (Keyton, 2001). This debrief was not recorded. None of the participants expressed any concerns during the debrief. I also asked individual participants at the beginning of the individual interview how the couple's interview was for them. Three participants (all women) said they were surprised the questions were so focused on negative things like conflict, but that they felt comfortable during the interview. Two participants (Mexican men) said they were surprised the questions were not *more* personal or intimate.

<div align="center">Role of Researcher</div>

It is important to make some comments about my role as the researcher in such an intimate interview-based study. As a privileged outsider, or semi-insider, to middle-class Mexican culture, I was somewhat of a participant-observer in this study. As such, and as the sole researcher in this project, it is important to be reflexive; one way to do this is to note the potential influence of my personal traits on the research participants. While I share a similar class and education background with the participants, these issues likely did not present a barrier to communication, but two other traits were especially salient in this study: my race/ethnicity and gender. I am a U.S. American of mixed heritage (various European and Native American), born and raised in a middle class family with a White identity. However, due to my extended contact with Mexicans and Latinos, the fact I have been bilingual since adolescence, my style of dress, and my physical appearance, I often pass for a middle class or affluent Mexican in Mexico, particularly in

Guadalajara. In a study that examines U.S. American-Mexican conflict, I thought my

Anglo-ness and my racial and cultural ambiguity might have an effect, positive or

negative, on what participants disclosed and how.

As for gender, I am a heterosexual woman in my early thirties who is often

considered attractive by men. I thought my femaleness might therefore affect the degree

and quality of participant disclosure; women might have been more apt to share their

experiences with me, while men might have felt less of a rapport or less inclination to

disclose certain things because I am a woman. However, I thought the effect might also

be the reverse – I have had several experiences with Mexican women trusting me with

their confidences less, and less quickly, than Mexican men. In private, I thought that men

might feel more of a rapport with me because they find me attractive, or more reserved

for the same reason because they felt uncomfortable or awkward.

During the study, I worked to be as sensitive, present, sincere, and aware as

possible during the interviews. This included self-disclosure when I felt it was

appropriate. Occasionally I was asked whether I, myself, was married, or what I thought

the cause of intercultural conflict was. I did my best to share enough of myself to build

trust and rapport, and reinforce my interest in this study and the participants' experience,

but not too much to create more rapport with one partner over another, nor the

appearance of any inhibiting bias or unprofessionalism.

Data Analysis

Collecting data is only one step along the journey to creating new knowledge

through research. The following step is to analyze the collected data. In this section, I

first describe my method of data analysis, then the analysis procedures I followed, and finally validation.

Method of Analysis

Given that this is a naturalistic study designed to pursue grounded theory development and elicit local/emergent meanings from my co-researchers, I used the grounded theory method combined with a five-step approach to interview analysis suggested by Peterson et al. (1994). Drawing on insights and interpretations by several scholars including the original creators of the method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof, 1995; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the grounded theory approach, also commonly known as the constant-comparative method (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), involves approximately seven stages: (a) coding as many categories as possible from the data; (b) constantly comparing each new incident to other incidents to determine into which category it falls, and whether existing categories hold or not; (c) naming categories and ascribing attributes to them; (d) creating a codebook which lists all categories, their code names, examples for each, number of incidents, and location of incidents in the data; (e) writing a theoretical memo which fleshes out thematic qualities of coding categories; (f) integrating categories and searching for connections across categories and either creating new ones or themes that span categories; and (g) dimensionalizing categories by locating category properties along continua, such as degree or strength.

The grounded theory/constant comparative method is complemented by Peterson et al.'s (1994) five-step approach to interview analysis. The first step is to search transcripts for themes that help answer the research questions. The second is to identify

specific quotes that support and develop themes. The third step is to determine the relative significance of themes, and the fourth step is to search for thematic hierarchies, or levels of theme importance, and oppositions, or items that do not fit the coding scheme. Finally, the researcher compares thematic hierarchies and oppositions across all interview and synthesizes the analysis accordingly.

I believe the broad approach taken by Peterson et al. (1994) provided a general framework that fit the interview-based data well, while the grounded theory method provided more guidance on how to identify themes. Since none of the steps are contradictory, I followed the method used by Peterson et al., drawing on the procedure of the grounded theory method on how to code and create categories. I also used Owen's (1984) three criteria to identify themes and their relative significance. These three criteria are the following: (a) recurrence, in which at least two parts of a data source have the "same thread of meaning" (p. 275) despite variations in wording; (b) repetition of key words and phrases; and (c) forcefulness as expressed in the form of the discourse in paralanguage such as volume, vocal inflection and use of pauses.

Analysis Procedures

Upon returning to the United States following the interviews, I personally transcribed all the tape recordings. There were approximately 18 hours of recorded interviews, plus interview notes for the one unrecorded phone interview. Total transcription time was 78 hours, yielding 404 pages of 1.5-line spaced text. I transcribed all text into the language in which the words were spoken, either English or Spanish. I did not translate Spanish-language responses into English, so as to not lose their context or nuances of meaning before analysis. During transcription, I verified my understanding

of the recordings with my interview notes, and added any pertinent nonverbal dialogue cues into the written text. I also made a separate set of typed notes for each couple regarding themes or observations that struck me as I was transcribing. I then went back over my field notes and added any additional insights from these notes that I had missed while transcribing. The completed set of "field and transcription notes" was 10 pages of single-spaced, mostly one-line comments and observations.

I began to identify some themes by writing out themes and issues I saw emerging from the field and transcription notes, grouping these into four categories: antecedents (to conflict), (conflict) behavior, and consequences (of conflict). I then cut the 10 pages of notes into strips with one comment or note on each strip. These I physically organized into clusters of themes under the same four categories, plus two additional categories I saw emerging: antecedent behaviors and miscellaneous. I pasted the clusters to sheets of paper, labeled the corresponding theme and made notes about possible subcategories. I then created a codebook that contained the major themes (antecedents, behaviors, consequences and miscellaneous), subthemes, examples, and notes on which couples mentioned each subtheme. I reread the transcripts, marking the text with differently colored pens to identify passages in each interview that supported the various themes. I also made notes in the codebook to connect each theme and subtheme to supporting quotes from the text. Something was defined as a theme if at least four couples mentioned or alluded to it. Through this process, I validated my categories, collapsed or moved some, and added a few, especially under conflict behavior. During the entire analysis process, I considered responses to all questions, and did not focus solely on answers to certain questions intended to address specific research questions.

Validation

Because qualitative inquiry is reflexive in nature and qualitative researchers study cases that are culturally and historically situated, credibility often replaces reliability, validity, and generalizability as the chief criterion of quality in qualitative research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). A qualitative researcher therefore aims to inspire confidence in consumers of her research results that she achieved "a" right interpretation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). During my study and its analysis, I ensured credibility of results in several ways. First, I conducted myself ethically at all times as described above, taking care to protect participant confidentiality, which included assigning pseudonyms to participants in any report of findings. Second, I made an effort to obtain an appropriate sample that expressed maximum variation. Third, I was transparent with participants about my intent, and I have been transparent in the written report about my interpretive framework and personal traits that might affect the research. Fourth, I attempted to be as complete, accurate and unbiased in my interpretation.

Finally, I validated results by providing them to participants for comment. Such "member validation" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) is an especially important feature of research aiming to determine local/emergent meanings. I e-mailed participants an executive summary of my general findings and asked if they saw themselves in the results – if my results rang true to their experience. In the end, resonance and illumination of findings is a more appropriate evaluation of qualitative research than repeatability (Potter, 1996), so if my results did not strike a chord with participants, they would lose some of their value in developing theory as well as improving peoples' lives.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Through the present study, it was my purpose to begin to close a gap in intercultural communication research, and start to bridge the divide between Mexicans and U.S. Americans who find themselves in conflict with each other, using intercultural marital conflict as an example context and a starting point. I intended to examine the ways Mexican and U.S. American marital partners perceive and describe how they manage interpersonal conflict with each other. This included antecedents that create and frame conflict, strategies employed to manage this conflict as it occurred, and the post-conflict experience.

In this chapter, I first describe some general aspects of participants' conflict experience to provide background for their more specific responses. I then group resulting themes around the three sub-research questions and their corresponding focus on conflict antecedents, behavior and consequences. I justify the grouping of these themes based on whether they seem to occur primarily before, during, or after, during, or following conflict incidents. While the designation of certain themes and sub-themes as antecedents, behaviors, or consequences may seem arbitrary, I explain their inclusion in that category, and later address the possibility that some traits and behaviors may fit in multiple categories in the conclusion of this results chapter. The conclusion is therefore the heart of this chapter, in which I synthesize the various results and provide an interpretation of the overall phenomenon of conflict in Mexican-U.S. American mixed marriages.

Experience of Conflict

What follows is a description of how participants described the frequency and type of their conflict, the vocabulary they used to conceptualize and talk about conflict, and the main sources of their conflict. This information provides a more detailed picture of the phenomenon of conflict that the participants reported experiencing. It gives a more complete context for what the participants mean when they talk about conflict with their partners. Throughout this report, all participant names have been changed to protect participant confidentiality. The following table is meant to provide a snapshot of the various pairings to facilitate readers' understanding of the results:

Table 1

Study Participant Couples by Nationality and Gender

Couple	U.S. American	Mexican
1	Hillary (woman)	Rodrigo (man)
2	Gabriel (man)	Iliana (woman)
3	Jennifer (woman)	Carlos (man)
4	Karen (woman)	Jorge (man)
5	Ben (man)	Leticia (woman)
6	Ann (woman)	Nicasio (man)
7	Linda (woman)	Adolfo (man)
8	Rachel (woman)	Francisco (man)

Frequency

All couples struggled at first with trying to assign numbers or statistics to the frequency of their arguments. Responses were usually general, such as "not very often," "often," or "almost never." Three[9] couples articulated explicitly that they do not keep track of or focus on such things. One U.S. woman, Hillary, said, "We shouldn't be keeping track of our arguments." Two other U.S. Americans gave similar responses: "I don't know. I try not to dwell on it," and "there's no way to know." One Mexican man, Nicasio, said, "I don't remember a recent conflict" (1).[10]

When probed to assign a frequency to incidents of conflict, two couples said once a week, one couple said twice a week and one answered three times per week. However, four couples also emphasized that the frequency of their conflicts varied with periods of work stress or family stress, or that conflict comes and goes in waves. Two reported they experienced less conflict than at the beginning of their marriages, while one reported more conflict now. Most, but not all, participants said that they believe they effectively resolve conflict with their partners most of the time.

The language used to describe conflict was an important aspect of how couples talked about their experience of it. When asked whether they experienced disagreements, arguments, or conflicts, most participants described ways in which they experienced all three in different ways and at different rates of frequency. One Mexican participant, Adolfo, summed up most couples' sentiments when he said, "It's very different, I don't

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[9] While a report of the number of participants or couples giving a particular response may seem inappropriate for a qualitative study of this nature, I include numbers throughout this chapter in keeping with Owen's (1984) criteria of recurrence, repetition and forcefulness for determining the significance of themes, to lend credibility to their importance.

[10] Original text of responses given originally in Spanish can be found in Appendix I by the number entered in parentheses at the end of the translated text.

know what category it would fall into because, well, a conflict and a fight can be very different in themselves, right?" (2). This comment was offered even before the question about vocabulary was posed. All the couples stated that their conflicts were mostly minor "disagreements," and that minor disagreements were most common between them, ranging from daily to once per week. More serious "conflicts" were less frequent, occurring just a few times during the entire relationship, and none of the couples reported having been physically violent with each other.

Vocabulary

Participants demonstrated surprising agreement in terms of what various conflict-related terms meant to them, particularly English language terms. Some participants readily observed a difference in "strength of force," *graduación* ["gradation"], *magnitud* ["magnitude"] or *grados de seriedad* ["grades of seriousness"] among the terms disagreement, argument, and conflict, or *desacuerdo, pleito,* and *conflicto.* One native English speaker conceptualized levels of conflict as "small and big" or "long term and short term." All participants saw a "disagreement" or *desacuerdo* as the mildest form of conflict, and the form that they experienced most frequently. Four participants (three native English speakers) described a "disagreement" specifically as a "difference in opinion," particularly one that is unimportant, or on an issue in which the involved parties are not invested; a difference that both can live with as is, with no need to solve it or change the other person's mind. Three native Spanish speakers described a *desacuerdo* as a difference in opinion; one called it *dos cabezas* ["two heads"]. Two other Spanish speakers described an example of a "disagreement" as *dónde colocar una cosa* ["where to place an object"] like a flowerpot [*maceta*].

Six couples saw "argument" as the next most-intense type of conflict. Two described an argument as "more heated" or "raising voice." All couples saw an argument as more important or serious, as something that needed to be resolved or decided, and something that involves more emotion. Three mentioned or implied that a disagreement can turn into an argument. A "conflict" was seen by most couples as the most serious, most urgent type of conflict. It was described as "larger," "bigger," or "long-lasting," and something more difficult to resolve that either needed to be resolved, or that was nearly impossible to resolve ("like no end in sight, that's never ever going to go away, you probably want to gloss over it"). A conflict was seen as maybe being a "Catch-22" or having major consequences; something that "continues to erupt" or "escalate," *como una guerra* ["like war"] or *algo que tienes que manejar con prudencia* ["something that you must manage prudently"]. A conflict was a situation or issue in which "we're not comfortable that we're thinking differently."

While native English speakers and bilingual native Spanish speakers agreed on the English terms, there was some minor disagreement between them, and among the Spanish speakers, about the Spanish-language terms. Although all saw a *desacuerdo* as the mildest form of conflict, half saw a *pleito* as the strongest form of conflict, while half considered *conflicto* the strongest. Responses showed that regardless of strength, native Spanish speakers saw a *conflicto* as very similar to English speakers' concept of a "conflict," such as "having to decide something and not arriving at an agreement – an argument that's not resolved …but has to be resolved somehow" (3), or as a longer-lasting state. *Pleito* did not directly translate as an "argument" for most participants, although it was presented as similar to an argument in that it involved more emotions,

particularly negative emotions. Four participants saw a *pleito* as somewhat violent, involving purposefully hurting or offending someone else, or even *listo para matar* ["ready to kill"]. Two mentioned a physical component of a *pleito* – that it can be a physical fight. One of these respondents was a U.S. American who had been in Mexico for many years, and actually disagreed with his Mexican wife who stated that a *conflicto* was stronger than a *pleito*. Interestingly, two Mexican participants reported that the strongest form of conflict (*conflicto* for one and *pleito* for the other) can lead to permanent separation. No U.S. Americans gave similar responses for any of the words used. Like U.S. Americans, Mexicans mentioned that milder versions of conflict can lead to stronger versions.

Despite my focus on these particular terms, most couples preferred other words to describe conflict in their relationships. In fact, two Mexican participants mentioned that they do not use such terms. The most common words used were *discusiones* (roughly translated as "discussions," but emotionally stronger), used by five couples, and "fight" or the Spanish equivalent *pelea* (although one Mexican participants pointed out that a *pelea* is stronger than a "fight"), used by half the participant couples. Other terms were "issues," "problems," "frustrations," and "tiffs." Two couples frequently used "arguments." Regardless of terms of choice, all couples used several different words to describe the different types of difficulties they experienced.

Given this variety of language used to conceptualize conflict, and the fact that participants view different words as varying in meaning and manner of expression in their relationships, I responded during the interviews in two ways. First, I favored the vocabulary of the participants; for instance, I used the word "fight" or *pelea* to phrase my

questions to those couples that tended to talk in those terms about their conflict. Second, I used a variety of terms for all participants throughout the interviews. For example, I often combined two or three into the same question, such as "What usually happens after your fights or disagreements?" or asked questions twice or more, using different terms for conflict. I found this dual approach effective in garnering a wide range of textured responses.

Sources

The sources of the many types of conflict the participants experience were even more diverse than their rich vocabulary. However, two main themes emerged. First, five couples reported most of their conflict was because of *cosas pequeñas*/"small things," "little things," or *cosas bobas* ["dumb things"]. Second, five couples also mentioned some form of lack of understanding as a source of conflict, such as: "not being understood," "misunderstanding what the other is trying to say," or "he understands things his own way." One bilingual couple emphasized such understanding issues are not about a language difference, but about communication style and listening skills.

There were a few other minor sources of conflict that a few participants mentioned. Two cited language or culture as part of their misunderstandings. One couple that did not cite understanding as an issue per se did state that *diferencias de educación* ["difference in upbringing"], or the different way they think about things, is a source of conflict. Other main sources of conflict included religion, different personalities, gender differences, styles of planning or using time, where to spend vacations or holidays, how to spend money, tasks and chores, and proper ways to raise or discipline children. Many

of these concerns emerged as antecedents to conflict and are described in greater detail in the following section.

<div align="center">Antecedents to Conflict</div>

During the interviews, I asked questions intended to identify antecedents to conflict incidents. The research question I addressed through such questions was RQ1a: What are the principal issues or antecedents that create and frame interpersonal conflict between U.S. American and Mexican marital partners? Curiously, it was this area that provided some of the richest responses and most detailed analyses from the participants. Seven themes framed the conflict the couples experience by creating it, exacerbating it, reducing it, or contributing to its management: atypicality, normalcy, external stressors, antecedent communication behaviors, culture, power/authority, and similar values.

Atypicality

All eight of the participant couples described themselves as atypical in some way – as individuals, or couples, or both. Atypicality is a conflict antecedent because possessing an identity as an atypical person and/or couple help frame couples' perceptions of themselves, and frame their experience with the world, their partners, and their marriages. Such identity and perceptions contribute to the context for conflict in their marriages. In many cases, participants saw themselves as atypical even before their intercultural marriage, or demonstrated traits traditionally seen as atypical to their gender or culture, and so for some, atypicality was even an antecedent to their relationship, let alone its conflict. Atypicality is also a theme that appears to unite couples and thus provides context to how they manage conflict with their partners as well as contributes to

their commitment to the relationship. There were three subthemes to this category, which included: the ideal partner, cultural atypicality, and struggle.

Ideal partner. Three Mexican participants talked about how they would have had, or had, difficulty finding a Mexican partner that would meet their needs. Rodrigo even stated directly he purposefully looked for a U.S. American woman to be his wife and the mother of his children because he wanted a woman with qualities that "would be 10 times harder to find in a Mexican woman," such as valuing and respecting work, being separate from her extended family, and reading to her children. As a single mother, Iliana had a hard time finding a Mexican partner that would accept her son. Something that impressed her about Gabriel, her U.S. American husband, was how he included her son in their lives even during courtship, and how he fought for her son to receive benefits after they married as if the child were his natural son; "he went and fought, like any father would fight" (4). Similarly, Leticia, who married Ben when they were in their 30s, did not find what she was looking for in Mexican men:

> I think being mixed, in my case has helped a lot, because my way of being didn't identify me with a lot of Mexicans. My way of being is very liberal and [Ben] accepts it …I don't doubt there are Mexicans that would also accept it, but not the ones I've dealt with. That was a problem, to want to also have my own life (5).

Cultural atypicality. In a similar vein, many of the participants are culturally atypical, especially in their degree of liberalness or conservativeness, particularly around gender roles. Again, as Hoopes' (1979) preponderance of belief model demonstrates, cultures are not monoliths, but include a wide range of diversity and individual difference. However, in discussing cultural atypicality here, I refer to the fact that

individual participants in this study often deviated from what is perceived and accepted to be various norms for their corresponding national cultures.

Three of the U.S. American women marveled at their own adventurousness to move to Mexico and marry a Mexican, especially Hillary and Ann, who made that decision in the 1960s. Karen mused, "Moving to Mexico – who *does* that?" At the same time, three women expressed how conservative they were compared to other U.S. American women. Hillary, for example, wanted to be a mother at the height of the women's movement:

> Thirty years ago was … really women's lib, and women in the workplace was just starting to dig in… in fact, I knew that I wanted to be a mom with my kids… I want to be a mom the way my mom was.

Jennifer, who was frustrated with trying to make friends in an overly conservative Guadalajara during her study abroad program in the late 1980s, was daring enough to send her later husband, Carlos, a note on a napkin while watching him play in his band at a local nightspot. She even went backstage afterwards, but drew the line there:

> He told me, here is my phone number, you can call me. I said no, since I thought I was pretty daring in going after him. I didn't want to be so daring to call him, so I said no, I'm not going to call you, but you can call me (6).

Leticia was impressed with Ben's reserved behavior compared to other U.S. Americans. She noted that what attracted her to Ben when they first met in a discotheque in Puerto Vallarta was that he was "decent" and different from other *gringos* that "were like octopus" and tried too soon to touch and hold her tight.

Three of the men are quite atypical in their gender roles. Jorge and his brothers were raised to cook, clean and be self-sufficient. In fact, Jorge contentedly plays more a role of "house husband" in a family in which his wife, Karen, has the better-paying, steady job. Three of the Mexican men served me beverages and attended to the refreshments, which is usually a woman's duty in Mexico. Rodrigo, who described himself as "a lot more identified with the work ethics [in the U.S.] and with the values" was a very involved Mexican father, even participating in the physical care of his three infant children, openly advocating breastfeeding to his peers, and "jumping up" to clear the table during dinner parties at their home. Hillary observed, "he loved the shock value of it," and how his behavior would start arguments among their guests in which the wives would point out to their husbands that some men do help out their wives. Rodrigo said, "the values we have many times are not the values we find in other Mexican couples."

One other way that the couples are culturally atypical is in their relationships with friends and family. Rodrigo stood by Hillary whenever his extended family criticized her or them as a couple, for example. Most of the couples stated they either do not have many friends outside family, or have mostly friends that were also mixed like themselves, or also culturally atypical, such as "international" couples and people from other parts of the world. This is in part due to the fact that several of the couples have one or both partners working at the American School, a very international setting, but also due to what Hillary described as "the commonality of the difference."

Struggle. Struggle was the third major way the participants experienced atypicality. Half of the couples experienced periods of separation or long distance relationships, seeing each other every few months, or only after an entire year. Ann and

Nicasio spent much of their four-year *noviazgo* (pre-marriage dating period; courtship) apart during the 1960s in an absence of e-mail, affordable long distance telephone service, and express mail. Linda and Adolfo went through an agonizing two-year period of back-and-forth, including an incident in which Adolfo was deported from the Dallas airport en route to Chicago for their wedding. Whether due to distance or circumstance, two couples mentioned they did not experience typical courtship. Linda said:

> I think what was really hard is ... we never *dated*. We never were boyfriend and girlfriend like five minutes away from each other. ... When I saw [Adolfo] when I came to visit Guadalajara, he was on his best behavior ....so that was very hard when we first got married was just basic getting to know each other, which we didn't have.

Apart from struggling together, and struggling to *be* together, several participants spoke of, or alluded to, how they had struggled or suffered a lot in life (e.g., with relationships, their families of origin, abuse, addiction). They also mentioned they found refuge in their mixed marriage. Iliana said:

> I had many misfortunes before getting married. …so I didn't care about the physical. It mattered more that someone valued me as a woman – as a mother – that he respected my son, took him into account; that he offered me something. And with [Gabriel] I found all that (7).

Normalcy

While all the participants see themselves as atypical, seven also described their relationships as very normal. Like atypicality, normalcy is an antecedent to conflict because it seems to be a key element in how the participants view themselves and their

relationships, which helps create context for the couples' conflict, and their ability to manage it. For instance, a couple or individual that sees their degree of marital conflict as greater than normal might experience more distress about conflict, which might translate into certain behaviors or management strategies not usually employed by couples who see their conflict as normal.

The couples in the study view themselves, and their conflict, as normal or natural compared to other couples. Rodrigo said, "We would be Martians if we didn't [have conflict]." Gabriel observed, "I think a lot of our disagreements and conflicts are normal; they're not anything different than any other couple faces…just normal new couples, new husband and wife things." Ben said, "It's just like a normal life, you can't agree on everything." Leticia mused, "Most of my girlfriends told me that I was dumb to marry him. They told me it was a risk, and I said any marriage is a risk even if you're from the same race, religion, or whatever" (8). Jorge observed that "with other couples we see ourselves as very similar in daily matters" (9), to which Karen added, "You guys are all dads and you're all nice husbands and you all take care of the house and we're all the same age … and we all go to Wal Mart… we go on vacation…"

One aspect of life that contributes to the participants' sense of normalcy is having children. Seven of the couples have children (and the other expecting a child), and five mentioned that being parents created commonality with others, including creating more commonalities with other couples and Mexicans in general that served to integrate the U.S. American partner more into Mexican culture. Karen said, "If you're a couple without kids your life is much more different than without. When you have kids ... it's like you know, you have everything in common."

External Stressors

External stressors emerged as a clear catalyst to actual conflict between the participant couples. External stressors are what make the "little things" into bigger things, and which contribute to the periods of greater conflict, or make a person "more susceptible." Six couples mentioned or alluded to this theme. The most common example was work stress coming home to the family or relationship, followed by being tired. Karen summed it up this way, "…conflict always tends to be around bigger, stressful times at school … it's not because of anything else other than just a lot of, a big stressful something outside the home, not because of the home." Partners with cyclical work cycles, whether in education or self-employment, especially cited this theme as an antecedent to conflict. Work stress takes the form of feeling sensitive because of a bad incident at work, feeling rushed, or wanting more personal time to unwind. Other external stressors included major life changes such as a partner's parents moving in or moving to the United States. One couple mentioned the larger economic situation in Mexico, while another cited the unfortunate timing or combination of problems.

Antecedent Communication Behaviors

While communication in itself is a behavior, there were certain *non-conflict* communication behaviors demonstrated or reported by the couples that existed in their relationships outside of, and prior to, conflict. These behaviors frame and affect any ensuing relational conflict the couples experience, but are not behaviors that manifest *during* conflict. Communication behaviors that occur *during* conflict are discussed in the following section on conflict behaviors.

Communication was a major theme that emerged either overtly or indirectly as both an antecedent behavior that caused or exacerbated conflict (negative), or as a behavioral or relational antecedent behavior that served to prevent, minimize, or manage conflict (positive). I observed a great deal of diversity among the couples in terms of their non-conflict communication styles. Some were quite balanced in the amount they talked; in others one partner dominated (usually the husband). About half of the couples interrupted each other a lot or talked at the same time, while others were very sequential in their speech patterns. Some were very clear and direct, while others were less precise, or even had trouble answering the questions. However, none of *these* particular communication styles appeared to correspond with any couple's sense of satisfaction with themselves or the relationship, nor seemed to have much impact on the creation or resolution of their conflicts. Negative and positive trends did appear in *other* areas of their non-conflict communication behavior. There were three such areas of antecedent communication behaviors: positive styles and skills, negative styles and skills, and negative content.

Styles and skills: negative. Three areas of non-conflict communication styles and skills serve to *create* or exacerbate conflict. The first is language differences or difficulties, which pose somewhat of a problem for three couples, and is a source of teasing for a fourth. One Mexican participant indirectly expressed that the family speaks in English when the U.S. American wife is around because her errors in Spanish sound "annoying" and "too bad," but he does not feel bad about making errors in English because it is his second language. One U.S. American wife, while grateful for her spouse's fluency in English, said that sometimes her husband misuses an English word

that actually communicates stronger emotion than he intends, or takes too long to communicate in English, which frustrates her. These behaviors sometimes lead to minor disagreements or conflicts. Another couple occasionally fights over a misunderstanding rooted in language differences. Jennifer said:

> There's been … probably three or four times in our marriage where we've actually kind of gotten angry at each other because we … just misunderstood each other … He's offended because he thinks I said something, or I did say something that I didn't mean to say because of Spanish or something like that, but …usually we laugh about that once we figure it out.

The language issue is most pronounced for Gabriel and Iliana, because not only is Gabriel's Spanish poor, Iliana's English is not fully fluent. Since Iliana's job requires using English, she said she becomes tired and frustrated with translating for Gabriel also, who admitted his efforts to learn Spanish have diminished since dating and marrying Iliana. Therefore she does not translate everything for Gabriel, resisting his efforts to understand, insisting that no one is talking about him, and certain things are not important for him to know. This creates a sense of powerlessness and isolation for Gabriel. Such language competence issues make basic communication functions more complicated and can add to frustration, even for relatively bilingual Jennifer who has no trouble expressing herself emotionally to her husband in Spanish, but has difficulty giving directions or using specialized vocabulary to give information. Karen, who is fully bilingual, emphasized the importance of common language by saying that "for most successful couples, getting along means knowing each other's language."

A second area of antecedent communication skills or styles that creates or contributes to conflict is husbands' perceived lack of awareness of, or effective response to, their wives. Even in couples in which the husbands are generally regarded as perceptive and responsive, incidents of lack of awareness or response created tension or frustration for wives, which sometimes leads to conflict. Five husbands (three Mexican) are at least occasionally perceived this way, or demonstrate communication behavior which leads to conflict that could be perceived as lack of awareness, or self-centeredness. Two wives reported frustration with having to repeat themselves, or their husbands doing certain behaviors repeatedly. They were also frustrated with husbands repeatedly failing to take initiative despite the wives' repeated attempts to communicate displeasure with something, or despite similar situations having led to conflict in the past. One wife used to become angry because her husband did not ever ask her what she wanted to watch on television, always flipping on his favorite stations. Another wife became angry because she felt her husband assumed she would take care of a major holiday task by herself. Two wives said that they do not always feel their husbands reciprocate their interest and desire to please and accommodate the other. Linda described it this way:

> No matter how much I explain and beg and whatever, he just sometimes doesn't get it … And I'm very conscious about, if he says something, I will make a point to be conscious about it and try to change it … I really try to understand his feelings and where he's coming from, and I don't know if he necessarily always does that for me.

A third area of communication styles and skills that causes problems is when both partners are similarly non-communicative. Only one couple was this way, but they stand

in contrast to other couples in terms of their apparently low level of satisfaction with their ability to manage conflict. While most other couples consist of one expressive and one less expressive partner, or have at least one proactive or initiating partner, this couple with very similar communication and personality styles seemed to have more unresolved conflict and frustration with how to manage it.

Styles and skills: positive. Four areas of non-conflict communication styles and skills serve to *prevent or divert* conflict. First, half of the couples value communication, engage in direct communication, and see themselves as open and communicative. This is elaborated in a later section on similar values as an antecedent theme. Second, five couples demonstrated nonverbal rapport through physical contact during the interview, adoring or confirming eye contact, and in general had an aura of positive energy. Two regularly finished each other's sentences. Linda described the positive impact of such rapport on their relationship:

> …he knows me well enough where I can give him a face, or he can give me a face, and I know there's more behind that. Or it's his happy face without him having to say anything, and it's peaceful where there's so much chaos [in the world].

Third, four couples mentioned their partner's listening ability in general as a positive aspect of their ongoing communication. More husbands mentioned this about their wives, but three women also noted this about their husbands. For instance, Ann said that Nicasio:

> …always listens … and it's not just a peripheral listening, it's a deep listening … You have all of his attention, and I think that's the best, because you know that

you're being heard. What you're saying is being heard and understood, … and

usually I will get a response that is a very thoughtful response.

Finally, husbands' perceptiveness of their wives was a theme that came out in six

couples. This is an antecedent communication behavior that wives noticed and

appreciate, and which prevents or minimizes conflict. This may seem contradictory to

the earlier negative antecedent theme of husbands' lack of awareness or responsiveness to

their wives. However, most of the wives reported experiencing both these behaviors

from their husbands to varying degrees; neither seem to be static traits of most of the

husbands, but rather situational or periodic responses. I elaborate further on this apparent

contradiction in the conclusion of this results chapter.

The most common description of this theme was husbands' ability to read their

wives or their body language, and husbands' indirect attempts to please their wives.

While this seemed to be a trait especially of the longer-married couples, it was the

combination of the husband's perceptiveness with a constructive response that was

critical. Karen said:

He knows how to read how I'm feeling. If [I'm] like, … really stressed and

upset, and something that happened or whatever, he know to take care of the kids,

make sure that they do their homework or take care of them … [He's] just so

calm and perceptive of my needs, the way I come home ... he can read in my

voice.

Hillary had similar experiences with Rodrigo:

We seem to have a real pulse on each other's moods, you know, not even

anything verbal. He will sense when I am distant, or I am angry… even if I'm

decided I'm not going to say a thing, he's like, ah, OK, what is it, [Hillary]? And

I'm like nothing! Uh, just, you know, spill.

Remembering the past and incorporating previous learning is also part of this

perceptiveness. Ann, who has trouble making changes to plans, talked about how

Nicasio has adapted over the years:

He knows it right away. He knows immediately before he tells me that there's a

change that it's going to upset me, so … I think he tries to approach things, kind

of give me a warning. Or you know, set it up in such a [positive] way.

Content: negative. The verbal content of non-conflict or pre-conflict

communication can also have a negative or positive impact on any subsequent conflict.

There were two areas of potentially negative antecedent communication behaviors among

the couples in terms of communication content. All three of these areas were not about

conflict communication content, but rather non-conflict communication content that often

leads to conflict. The first, found in four couples, consisted of Mexican partners being

resistant to doing things for their spouse simply because it would please him or her, or

just because their partner asked. In fact, Adolfo defined an "argument" as a situation in

which "I know she's right, but I don't know, maybe because of pride I don't tell her, you

know, you're right, or because it's something that affects me personally" (10). A fight

often results from his resistance. Carlos explained it this way:

It's a way of the Mexican; that someone tells you – you're in disagreement with

someone and you say lots of things, like I'm not going to do it. But in the end,

you already know you're going to do it, but first you say everything to make the

other person feel bad. …This is for all Mexicans. It bothers them that another

person tells them what to do; receive orders… It's a cultural thing that, I think

comes from [colonization under] the Spanish (11).

This tendency has created frustration for Jennifer in planning family activities, and making requests of Carlos.

The second area of negative communication content is the invalidation of one partner by the other, which occurred in three couples. Two of these partners were Mexican; two were men. None mentioned it as a source of conflict, but since all of these couples seem to have other areas of tension, I believe this behavior might be a contributing antecedent to actual conflict, or a contributing tension that might help cause conflict. One U.S. woman reported her husband sometimes makes derogatory remarks about *gringos* or women, or minimizes the importance of her job. Two couples told their partners outright during the interview that they were wrong when expressing a personal opinion. In one couple, the wife minimized her husband's interpretations of events as overreacting or "always thinking the worst," refusing to believe him when he told her about problems like the car needing repairs or having been broken into. For the U.S. American partners, such invalidating messages may lead to isolation and feelings of frustration that may create or exacerbate conflict.

Culture

The fifth theme of conflict antecedents is cultural difference. Whether articulated as such or not, two major culturally based sources of conflict emerged from the interviews: time and family, which also overlapped. For instance, sometimes conflict arises from different ideas about the amount of time to spend with family. There was a third, less significant category of cultural antecedents: ethnocentrism.

Time. Conflicts stemming from different uses and concepts of time were mentioned by six couples, two of which even stated that time-related issues are their principal source of conflict. This antecedent manifested in three subthemes: planning, flexibility/rigidity orientation, and fast/slow orientation. First, six couples mentioned issues with planning; specifically, that the U.S. American likes to plan far into the future much more than the Mexican partner feels comfortable, or thinks practical. Also, once made, the U.S. American partner does not like to change plans. This is particularly evident when U.S. American partners try to get their spouses to commit to vacation dates or a holiday destination months in advance, and the Mexican partner agrees halfheartedly, not taking such a commitment seriously. One Mexican wife admitted she agreed to spend the following Christmas (a year away) in the U.S. because the date seemed so far away, implying she might change her mind later when the date got nearer. Adolfo stated the principal source of conflict with Linda is the fact that:

> She is a real planner, she wants everything in writing ... and calendared. That is, everything has to be the day she said … the day she thought it or imagines doing it, and wants to follow things literally; and well, that's not possible, right? – plan what you're going to do tomorrow – because it hasn't exactly happened, so you don't know what's going to happen (12).

Iliana talked about how Gabriel always thinks ahead and is very preventative, yet she says, "I always wait until things happen and then I act." She experienced tension and frustration when Gabriel would come to pick her up from work, and wait for her at the exact hour her shift ended while she and other employees stayed late to help their bosses.

"I felt comfortable [doing that]," she said. "I still feel comfortable leaving late, but he doesn't understand" (13).

Carlos mentioned difficulties sometimes because Jennifer:

…plans everything very systematically, and I wait for the last minute. That, 'Oh, but I have to go rehearse,' or 'I have to go,' and that bothers her. That is, she wants from the time I get up to have an agenda of the whole day but I don't; I go as the day unfolds (14).

Adolfo summed up many Mexicans' sentiments this way: "This could be applied perhaps to culture because, well, American people like all of that – a lot of organization ... structure, and planning of their activities. They seem like little clocks, right!" (15).

The second subtheme, a flexibility/rigidity orientation, was evident in the various ways U.S. Americans and Mexicans differed in their time management styles, and in the same couples that have issues with planning. However, flexibility/rigidity also manifested in more general orientations towards time and the rhythm of life. Nicasio summed up his only difficulty with Ann as "her mania of being so rigid with plans" (16). Gabriel commented that, overall, Iliana is more relaxed, and helping him be more that way. Karen described her intense need for organization, order, and sequence of activities, and her frustration when Jorge does not function within that mode. Linda commented that she likes to get things over with so she can relax, but that Adolfo does things reversed; even if it means washing the car in the dark after the soccer game on TV is over. Adolfo, on the other hand, talked about Linda's tendency to become easily annoyed, particularly by things Mexican. He said that while he could live anywhere (he

is flexible), she only seems to function well in the U.S. (she is rigid). Carlos observed that:

> For a Mexican it's easier to throw oneself into things than to be planning ...
> There's a saying – *si pega, bueno, y si no, despegado estaba* ["if it sticks, well
> good, but if not, it was unstuck to begin with"]. …This is the principal cultural
> difference between she and I; that she plans everything ... and I'm not that way –
> I don't know what's going to happen. Neither does she, but she makes an outline
> of what she thinks is going to happen (17).

The third time subtheme, fast/slow orientation, was cited by four couples as an area of potential conflict because U.S. Americans tend to want things done more quickly than Mexicans, while Mexicans seem "calmer" or more apt to "think things through." Sometimes Gabriel struggles to understand that while he prefers to resolve problems quickly, Iliana "can live with it for a while." Despite any frustration, many couples recognize the benefit of having one "slower," more deliberate partner in the marriage; Ben appreciates the fact that Leticia tends to make more rational decisions because she is less risk-prone, and more deliberate in her thinking.

Family. Family was the other major category of cultural difference. Seven couples cited conflicts rooted in family-related issues in two major areas: time spent with extended family, and child raising. All but one of the U.S. American partners value immediate and extended family at least as much as their partners, and all understand the high value Mexicans tend to place on family. For example, one U.S. American husband, Gabriel, was very hesitant to ask his Mexican wife to move to the U.S., and another refused to ask his wife to move to the U.S. at all. Gabriel, a Hispanic New Mexican who

plans to move back to the U.S. with Iliana in the next couple years observed, "I know it's important for Hispanic families to be together. And, as important it is for Hispanic families, it's more important I think for Mexican families."

Despite understanding the Mexican value of family, the U.S. American partner in half the couples feels uncomfortable with the amount of time spent with the Mexican partner's extended family, or the degree of extended family members' involvement in their lives. Linda talked about a time she wanted to go home after spending extended time with Adolfo's family, and he retorted that she "never wanted to spend time with [his] family." She responded, "We were with your family Friday afternoon; I was with them two hours yesterday; we just saw them. We're with your family all the time." Like Gabriel, Linda, who is Mexican American, also noted cultural differences between her and her husband regarding family relationships:

> I have a large family and we're super close, we all live really close together, but sometimes I feel forced to be with [Adolfo's] family. … [Adolfo's] out of town, let's say for three days, and they call me every single day. 'You want to come over?' 'No, I'm OK, I'm fine.' …But they're so kind. Like, 'Well I know you're alone, you don't have to make dinner. You don't have to make lunch, come on over.' … I would never see my Mom calling [Adolfo] every single day asking him to come over."

Child raising was a second cultural issue related to family, experienced by four couples. Ann and Nicasio clashed for a time over which country would be the most suitable place for their children's education. Rachel and Francisco clash over type of discipline and degree of leniency for their two young daughters. Hillary and Rodrigo

experienced one of the greatest conflicts of their marriage over whether their adult son could move back into their home after finishing his undergraduate degree in the United States. Hillary said she was really at odds with the idea, then one day, "[Rodrigo] said to me, 'You know what? If you think I'm ever going to put a kid of mine out of the house, you're crazy.' " Rodrigo explained, "It's not that I *wanted* him; I wanted like a normal thing. OK, you're not married, you can live here...just like I did when I was not married …For me was the most normal." Ben also expressed a firm stance against his now ten-year-old son ever living with him and Leticia after getting his college degree.

Ethnocentrism. The term "ethnocentrism" was first introduced to the study of culture by Sumner (1906) who defined it as "the view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it" (p. 13). Ethnocentrism was the third culturally based conflict antecedent found in this study, present in some form in four couples. For two, it manifests simply in U.S. Americans' unhappiness or frustration with Mexican culture that irritates their Mexican partners or contributes to conflict. Hillary realized during the conflict over her son moving back home that she had been narrow minded, which had caused, and then exacerbated conflict with Rodrigo and her son:

> And I thought [to myself], oh! Where have you been? Where did you think you were? You just love that you have these bicultural kids, and this bicultural family. And that's fine as long as all of the culture is what you like…..I realized that I was, you know, really just applying values where they were convenient to me as long as they fit in with my way. And you know I'd been being really quite insensitive to the situation.

Gabriel expressed anger over poor customer service in Mexico, "because service is number one in the States." Iliana, his wife, showed frustration with his inability to understand that the system in Mexico is different and his responses are not constructive. Gabriel later said, "She tends to get a little upset if I get mad at Mexico, you know, the general culture."

Two U.S. American partners expressed outright ethnocentrism, which sometimes led indirectly to conflict. Adolfo, who feels somewhat concerned about some of Linda's views, summed it up by saying:

> I never thought my country was the best in the world, or that my culture was the best of the world. And she has the idea that there's nothing better than the United States ... For her, staying here would be a step backwards … This has been the only thing in which we don't agree…. The first time it was difficult to be here; [returning to the U.S.] was the only escape. But in reality, you know what? It was difficult, and maybe tomorrow no longer, right? … This does come to bother me, like she's never fought for anything, and now she has to (18).

Ben, who made repeated ethnocentric comments, criticized the fact that Mexicans cannot say yes, and cannot arrive on time. He talked about how, if he and Leticia host a dinner party and issue invitations for 9:00 p.m., they serve "on time." "And if they're late, too bad – we start at 9:00," he said, proudly. Over time, the couple's friends have adapted, but Leticia said, "What he doesn't understand is … that in Mexico when people say the party starts at 9:00, doesn't mean that you have to be there at 9:00! And after 13 years he doesn't understand that!" Leticia also talked about how she works to mediate between Ben and Mexicans regarding time. For example, if the couple receives an

invitation for a 9:00 engagement, she tells Ben it's for 10:00 so they will arrive at the culturally appropriate time, and Ben can still feel he is being punctual. And regarding the possibility that his son might live at home until he marries, like other Mexican children, Ben said, "Well my father would never have stood for that. And I'm not going to stand for that either." Such a stance may present a conflict later, when his son comes of age.

Power and Authority

A sixth general area of conflict antecedents is power and authority. While many of the subthemes here overlap with other antecedent categories, this is a separate theme in itself. Perceived imbalances in power and authority within the marriages often led to, or exacerbated conflict, independent of other categories. In fact, two wives seemed less satisfied with their marriages than their husbands because of what appeared to be an imbalance of power.

Over half the couples stated or showed they value equality in their relationship, or experience their shared power and authority to be a positive trait that distinguishes their union from others'. Two wives (one U.S. American) appreciated that they felt more equal with their spouses than their mothers had in their marriages. In her private interview, one of these wives stated that one of the reasons she and her husband can resolve conflicts successfully most of the time is because they're "equally selfish" and good at taking care of themselves and not letting the other "walk all over" him or her. Two couples said they value co-decision making; in fact one of these wives said, "I think we have disagreements because we're always try[ing] to decide together." Another husband spoke with pride about the rational, calm way he and his wife prevent and work out their disagreements. He explained how he believes those couples who resort to

violence don't have good communication or well-developed mental and verbal tools for resolving conflicts: "… shouts and blows don't resolve it, they simply complicate it, they make it deeper … I believe blows are really – and shouts – about one dominating the other" (19).

Despite the value of equality and co-decisioning, not all partners, especially wives, always experience their unions as equal partnerships. Thus, actual imbalances in power and authority, whether chronic or occasional, are sources of conflict. First, as described in an earlier section on antecedent communication behaviors (see p. 101), about half the wives feel at least occasionally disempowered by limited success in getting their husbands to respond to their needs (e.g., spending quality time together, not repeating certain behaviors, or providing more help with household tasks and child raising). Second, four wives (three U.S. American), mentioned feeling overwhelmed and bearing an unequal burden of household tasks and responsibility for caring for children. Two couples in particular seem to fight often over whose responsibility certain tasks and chores were, and Rachel said conflicts stem not only from whose job is what, but also how those jobs are carried out.

Third, half of the husbands credit their wives' accommodating personality traits with being a principal reason why conflict in their marriage is minimal or easy to solve. They said their wives are "patient," "a good listener," "or easy to get along with," or "not conflictive," which helps minimize or manage conflicts. This could imply an imbalance in expectations and responsibility for handling or managing conflict; that husbands assign wives greater responsibility in maintaining relational harmony, and/or that wives take on a greater burden in maintaining that harmony. It could also indicate a greater tendency of

wives, conscious or unconscious, to subsume their needs to their husbands', therefore appearing to be "patient," "not conflictive" or "easy to get along with." Indeed, one husband observed that his wife turned out to be less "permissive and passive" than he had expected after marrying her. As mentioned in the section on antecedent communication behaviors, some wives did note that their husbands are good listeners, but wives did not emphasize this trait as much as husbands did as key to resolving their differences. In fact, one of these wives blamed herself in part for her husband's frustrations and explosions because she was not always "focused on, and sensitive to his needs."

A fourth area of power imbalance is exercised in two couples by Mexicans over their spouses either through language or by asserting greater authority because the couple was living in their home country. As mentioned, Gabriel often feels isolated or excluded because Iliana does not translate everything going on in Spanish around him, and dismisses his need to understand. Two other Mexican husbands admitted conscious resistance to recognizing their spouse's point of view or granting a request out of pride. Two Mexican spouses also asserted that they know better how to handle or interpret a situation, or make a decision, than their spouse, because they know Mexican culture or Spanish better than their partner. However, they often maintained sole control of that situation instead of sharing it or trying to explain it to their spouses, like Nicasio did for Ann. One of these spouses said:

> I let the things happen and I act for myself. I think it, but I don't tell him because I feel it's very – not complicated to explain it to him – but ... I know how to manage it, but he wants to know in detail what I want to do, and sometimes I don't want to explain, because ... I know it will work. So I do it like this and that,

but not to explain to him – not translate everything. I simply let things happen…I
feel that here I know more or less how to manage people – not manipulate them –
I know how to solve a problem talking. I speak the language … and for him it's
more difficult (20).

Two couples experienced, or experience, conflict over money imbalances, a fifth
area of power imbalance. Early in their marriage, Jennifer and Carlos had a major battle
over a major purchase on which Carlos failed to consult with her first. Hillary sometimes
feels that Rodrigo minimizes her financial contributions to the family:

…he will take the decision away from me. You know, we'll discuss it, and then
he will just say no ... I've decided it's going to be that way, and I'm kind of left
there sputtering. And there's a lot of disparity in our earnings. And denigrate's
an ugly word, but he has hurt my feelings about that, and about the relative
importance of our jobs.

She expressed that she felt disenfrancished as a co-decision maker in their major conflict
over their daughter getting a car, because Rodrigo bought it for her despite Hillary's
protests. Rodrigo explained, "I made the decision because I was the one who was buying
the car."

Despite overtly expressed values of equality and co-decision making, in two cases
the reality seems to be a different one, in which the husband sees himself as clearly in
charge. Ben repeatedly asserted that Leticia "always wins," and that he "always" gives in
to her, even telling her, "I always bend. If you had to bend, you'd break." However, he
also said:

The decisions she's made, I've never gone against. I mean she's never disappointed me in that, and sometimes I feel that maybe my manhood has decreased a little because she does control the house. But you know what, it's OK. However, if I do say something, if I say no, if I really come down and say no I don't agree with it, it wouldn't be done, it wouldn't happen. You know, she knows that also.

In a telling description of his view of equality, Rodrigo asserted:

Someone has to have the baton… you feel secure and with support if you feel like somebody has the control. If you don't feel control in terms – not over-control – but support and direction, in my opinion, things don't go as it should…Somebody has to have a direction. Somebody has to have the baton. But everybody pitches in the orchestra. The director by itself wouldn't do anything. The orchestra plays and everything comes smooth, everybody pitches in, but it's necessary to have a consensus. *That consensus the director orders* [emphasis mine] … Even though you give your opinion, but you feel support, somebody's telling you, 'my opinion is this.' and then between the two of you will go somewhere, but somebody has to know where is that goal that you want to achieve ... [Hillary] would always have a point of view and say, 'No, I think it, still, you should have waited.' That's fine, that's her prerogative. She doesn't have to agree on everything. But in my opinion the goal was to create responsibility in [our daughter]. And I think I did it … But it doesn't affect the end result."

This very different concept of equality clashed with his U.S. American wife's assumptions about what equality meant:

> So maybe the stuff's never been resolved anyway…You know, I was really mad that my opinion hadn't been taken in – you know, counted as important – when his big thing is that, … oh, we are such an egalitarian marriage and everything counts the same. Well, you know, when push came to shove it didn't. And it was something that I didn't feel sort of ho-hum or lukewarm about, I felt really hot about. And I felt furious to not have my opinion valued as strongly, you know, have as much weight in the decision.

Similar Values

A final theme that emerged as an antecedent to conflict that assists in *preventing* conflict, and *minimizing potential* conflict, is similar values. Seven couples mentioned their similarity to each other in "values," "mentality," or "principles." This similarity was seen as stronger than cultural differences, and as a major uniting force. One Mexican husband said, "Although we approach things in a different way, I think we see many things in a very similar way." He further stated, "if there are common principles, I think they are much more powerful or important or dominant than different cultures – within Western culture" (21). His wife also mentioned that they did "have very similar values although [they] had grown up in such different worlds." Another participant said, "We pretty much agree on how we see the world, like big important issues like values." A couple of the participants mentioned that having such similar values made their conflicts even more disturbing because such conflicts were anomalies. Others alluded to the fact that other couples have conflict due to differences in values.

Four values in particular seem especially important to the couples: the value of equality, value of humor or fun, value of respect, and value of communication. As mentioned in the previous section on power and authority, about half the couples value the equality in their relationships. Half said that having humor and/or fun in their relationship or family is important, which I will explain in more detail as a conflict behavior in a later section. Over half of the couples, mostly wives, mentioned respect as an important value. One wife said, "He's my husband, you know, like I'm not going to take anything too far. I have a respect for him that I won't …ever think about. I don't ever get there to cross." Her husband also mentioned respect of each other's culture and religion as important to the marriage, and marriages in general. Ben and Leticia talked about the importance of showing respect for the other and respecting each other's wishes, as well as Leticia's appreciation of Ben's respect for her when they first met. Nicasio said:

> We know very well that respect is the best way to live together and resolve
>
> differences, because certainly we have differences. It's not possible to think that
>
> someone who's born in the United States and someone born in Mexico think
>
> alike, no… But if there is respect, communication, and acceptance that each
>
> person has a right to live his or her life, think how he or she wants, well, it's
>
> easier (22).

In a similar vein, and as mentioned in an earlier section on antecedent communication behaviors (see p. 102), five couples stated that they highly value communication. Five aspects of communication were especially salient: they enjoyed talking to their partners, they talked about a variety of topics, they talked frequently, they

gave it priority, and they used it to prevent conflict. A few remarked that they saw their spouse as a good friend and easy to talk to, and expressed difficulty understanding peers who did not talk to their spouses much, or who feel uncomfortable talking with them. Many saw themselves as having better-than-average communication with their partner, and as willing to confront issues or potential problems. In fact, Ann and Nicasio attribute much of their 30-plus years of relationship success to their daily ritual of sitting together with a drink and talking. Ann said:

> There have been the hard parts – in every marriage there are. But you know you work through them, and you get through them, but it depends totally on your communication skills…if you can't communication then there are problems, and if you can't communicate with your spouse's family, I also think there are problems.

In giving advice to colleagues who ask her about intercultural marriage, she cautioned, "You have to communicate; you have to be able to talk about your differences because differences there will be." Nicasio, for his part, mused:

> When we go to lunch or dinner, the time we spend seated is minimum two hours, because we're talking, talking, talking, of whatever topic we think of … and I have seen other couples that come to the table, ask for the menu, order their meal, and in half an hour they're paying and leaving! (23).

Summary

In conversations with the eight couples, seven areas emerged as potential antecedents to conflict. A sense of atypicality as individuals and couples serves to unite and establish their identities, while a feeling of normalcy provides context for their

relationships and their conflicts, both of which they see as relatively normal. External

stressors are often an antecedent that creates or exacerbates conditions leading to conflict.

Negative non-conflict communication styles, skills, and content often create conflict or

tensions that contribute to conflict, while positive non-conflict communication styles and

skills help prevent or minimize potential conflict. Culturally based approaches to time

and family are common areas of disagreement and conflict, and imbalances in power and

authority within a relationship often express in conflict, or provide added context to

disputes. Finally, similar values are a uniting point of departure that also serves to

prevent or frame conflict.   This summary is merely an abbreviated version of the results

of antecedents to conflict; I offer an interpretation of these findings in the conclusion

section at the end of this chapter.

<div align="center">Conflict Behavior</div>

Antecedents provide a contextual frame for the behaviors that occur during, and

immediately following, conflict. The research question that aimed to discern these

behaviors was RQ1b: What are the different strategies employed by U.S. American and

Mexican marital partners in successfully managing interpersonal conflict with each

other? This area of inquiry yielded four subcategories of conflict behavior: emotions,

direct/indirect communication styles, conflict management strategies, and post-conflict

behavior.

Emotions

Two emotion subthemes emerged: expressiveness during conflict, and pursuit-

withdrawal patterns. Six of the couples included one partner that tends to be quite

animated in conflict, while the other is more subdued. There seems to be no clear

correlation by nationality in which partner was which, but it seemed women are slightly more expressive during conflict than the men. "Animated" behavior included "raising voice," yelling, crying, and even throwing things. Only one couple said they ever used "bad words" and none had been physically violent. One wife described her animated Mexican husband as "Ricky Ricardo." Another wife talked about how uncomfortable she is with her husband's tendency to raise his voice – which causes her to withdraw – so he goes outside and yells to himself on the patio to "get it out."

Some of the partners' emotional styles during conflict correspond with one or more of their antecedent behavior styles or traits, while others did not. For example, most of the expressive partners also have immediate personality styles; that is, they tend to have "fast" orientations to time (see p. 108), and the emotional need to "get it out" during conflict. One said, "I'm the kind of person [where] I get it out of my system. I get it out and it's over with… I want to get it out, that's why I raise my voice…I don't keep it in me." On the other hand, some participants' emotional styles during conflict are quite different from their general demeanor. Two Mexican partners demonstrated such a difference; one is more emotional in general, but not in fights, and the other tends to be more relaxed than their partner in general, but more intense during fights.

A counterpart to the emotional expressiveness quality of conflict emotions is the pursuit-withdrawal dynamic. Three Mexican spouses mentioned they withdraw in conflict, *particularly* in response to an emotionally expressive spouse. Two mentioned that they consciously choose to withdraw *para calmarse* ["to calm down"]; one explained, "I prefer not to talk because I can be very offensive." One couple reported they both tend to withdraw, which in itself leads to uncertain resolution and continual

frustration. In turn, two U.S. American wives reported they pursue their withdrawing

Mexican husbands.

Direct/Indirect Communication Styles

Most wives perceive themselves as relatively direct in general, and are perceived

as such by their partners. In fact, a couple husbands cited their wives' expressiveness and

directness as helpful to them in being able to perceive their needs and respond

appropriately. However, these women are not always direct during conflict. This does

not seem to present a problem for either partner. However, the tendency of most of the

Mexican partners to be indirect – or "passive aggressive" as one spouse described –

during or prior to conflict, does create or exacerbate conflict, and causes tension or

confusion for the U.S. American partners. In fact, one couple that experiences repeated

conflict stated they just try to avoid behaviors and learn from mistakes, but rarely talk

about them. Both of these partners are indirect.

Two Mexican husbands mentioned somewhat of a struggle over how to approach

their wives, ask a question or make a suggestion so as to not offend, preferring to test the

waters indirectly, for example by posing hypothetical situations. One said:

> If she doesn't like something about me, she says it very directly… a very odd
>
> thing for me. That is, I'm not so direct… If something about her bothers me I
>
> don't tell her directly. Perhaps I do it with actions ... that will show her that I am
>
> annoyed with her (24).

Another Mexican spouse described the following incident, which turned into a minor

argument:

I felt that he spent a lot of time in front of the television and I saw it very

little; that is, we would lie down to see television and he would watch

what he wanted to watch. And one day I just said [to myself], why? That

is, no! Not because I wanted to see something Mexican [on television],

but because I didn't want to indulge him so much … I feel like he's very

selfish. Although I'm not saying to him, 'I want to see this,' because I

feel selfish – because he has the remote in his hand. And one time there

was a little problem because I told him, 'You know what? I'm going to

the room to watch television and I'm going to watch what I want to.'

And I locked myself in, and he says to me [Iliana] come here, come here,

you can watch the TV here. But I said no, I want to have the television to

myself for half an hour or an hour, but seeing what I want, not …just

what you want. But not because I don't like what he watches, I enjoy it

(25).

Such indirect responses may be a response when the partner feels they have no

other recourse to assert their power, like in Hillary's case following Rodrigo's decision to

buy their daughter a car: "…my daughter would call and say, 'Can I do this?' and I'd say,

'Call your dad, I'm not in charge.' And I mean, I was very angry for a long time about

that." Another normally expressive, direct U.S. American wife uses physical withdrawal

from her husband to communicate displeasure in public settings when her direct requests

are ignored or minimized by her partner.

Conflict Management Strategies

Participants revealed five major strategies to resolve or manage conflict: prevention, talking, apologies, giving in, and compromise. In terms of prevention, half the couples mentioned ongoing communication with their spouses as key to preventing conflicts before they happen. "We don't let them grow," said one wife. A husband said, "We've never let it go so far that the situation or argument [*pleito*] became major" [translation]. A couple participants cited the complementary nature of their personalities as helping them catch and manage potential problems before they become larger conflicts. Two mentioned dealing directly with difficult issues instead of ignoring them. For example, Nicasio said:

> [Ann] and I try to live life in an agreeable way. That is to say, we try to enjoy life… and to enjoy it, well one must remove little problems and make a relationship more fluid…We should learn how to resolve disagreements before they become arguments [*pleitos*], and never become conflicts… If you don't communicate, then the disagreement doesn't manifest, and quickly it manifests as an argument [*pleito*]. If you don't resolve the argument [*pleito*], it becomes a conflict, and when there's a conflict, uf! You have to resort to things that normally don't resolve (26).

Seven couples mentioned the most important way to manage or resolve conflict is talking about the problem or conflict after a fight; this was the second strategy. Their styles in going about this vary. Some couples prefer to deal with a problem immediately – a couple stated they have a policy to not go to bed without resolving any arguments from that day. As I described earlier, some partners need to express and get their

emotions out right away, before talking things over. One wife said, "I don't want to be mad at him for two hours, you know, which he'll do. He'll just sit there, mad. Like, don't you want to talk about it; don't you want to get this over with?" Other couples need a few minutes or hours apart, taking a break to "calm down." A couple even physically separate for a short period. One wife writes her husband letters during this separation period: "… I think before it gets too far, like if I feel something's brewing I have to get it off my chest…" Some couples express emotions for a while, *then* "take a break." One couple stated that sometimes upon "coming back" the problem had diffused and was no longer as great an issue. Regardless of the style or sequence of events, almost all the couples value talking as a conflict resolution strategy, particularly talking with minimal emotion and maximum calm, reason and logic. Ann and Nicasio actually create lists of pros and cons, and try to make mutual, rational decisions based on these lists. Ann says often this means going with her head over her heart, but that it eliminates conflict, because "when you see [the options] down in black and white [the best solution] kind of jumps out at you."

Apologies, the third strategy, were mentioned by five couples as an important step to resolving conflict. This is one type of talking that many couples find particularly important in getting to a point where they can discuss an issue calmly. It is an important strategy for re-initiating contact or conversation after a separation, especially if one party realizes he or she was wrong. None of the participants mentioned using an apology simply as a strategy – it seemed to be a genuine acknowledgement of fault or responsibility. There was no pattern in nationality or gender for who seemed to apologize more often.

The fourth strategy, giving in, was cited by four couples as a way for resolving more heated discussions and either avoiding further argument, or as a response to a partner that imposed his or her will. A perhaps more egalitarian form of mutual giving in, compromise, was cited by six couples in the following language: "compromise," "give and take," "meet in the middle," make concessions," and "pick your battles." A desire for harmony and absence of blame are important to these couples that sometimes achieve compromise by negotiating it directly through talking, or by intuitively taking turns giving in. One wife expressed it this way: "…maybe this time I give in, because I know that on another time he's probably given in [on] something that he really held close."

There were a few other strategies mentioned by a minority of couples as other ways they resolved or managed their conflict: (a) avoidance/non-discussion; (b) use of third parties, like children; (c) humor to diffuse tension [11]; (d) one partner's change of heart or mind; (e) change in external circumstances; (f) guessing what one's errors and attempting to avoid repeating those errors. While none of these were mentioned frequently enough to qualify as important conflict management strategies, they demonstrate the wide variety of tactics the participants employ to manage their conflicts.

Post-conflict Behavior

Following an argument or its resolution, most couples reported things went "back to normal," without any type of make up period. In fact, two of the longer-married couples stated that having a make up period following conflict would feel fake; that it cannot fix the problem or replace actual resolution. However, both of the most recently married couples did report experiencing a make up period that involved more physical

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[11] Carlos cited humor as especially important in lightening the mood and giving perspective: *En México decimos "reirse de tus desgracias."* ["In Mexico we say 'to laugh at your misfortunes' "].

closeness, *apapacho* ["cuddling"], and/or *chiqueo* ["spoiling or indulgence"]. Regardless of whether a couple had a make up period or not, the initiator of resolution (sometimes via an apology) was equally male and female; three couples reported the wife more often initiated and three reported the husband was the primary catalyst to mending hurt feelings and beginning the resolution process.

Summary

Four subcategories of conflict behavior emerged from the interviews: emotions, direct/indirect communication styles, conflict management strategies, and post-conflict behavior. Most couples are complementary in their varying levels of expressiveness, and their tendencies to pursue or withdraw; however Mexicans' indirectness often exacerbates conflict with their U.S. American partners. The couples employ a variety of conflict management strategies, but favor prevention, talking, apologies and compromise. After resolving their conflict or ending an argument, most of them resume their normal lives and communication patterns. As with the section on antecedents, this is only a summary, and interpretation and analysis is offered in the conclusion of this chapter.

<div align="center">Consequences of Conflict</div>

The third research question aimed to elicit information about what follows conflict resolution behavior and strategies. I wanted to discover the personal and relational outcomes of conflict – their effects on the marriage and the partners. RQ1c queried: What are the consequences of interpersonal conflict for U.S. American and Mexican marital partners? Three major themes emerged: positive identity, attribution to individual differences, and recognition of cultural differences. I conclude this section with some results on the couples' marital satisfaction.

Positive Identity

In part due to their ability to communicate and/or resolve conflicts, all but one of the couples expressed that they see themselves as more fortunate than other couples, and/or their relationship as better than others' relationships or marriages. Two mentioned they "won the lottery" in having such a wonderful partner or relationship. They see themselves as communicating more or better than other couples, being more open with each other, and/or spending more time together. One enjoys having more material wealth. A few appreciate their more equal relationship, or the way their spouse is more involved with parenting, compared to other couples. Nicasio said:

> I know couples that seem to get along well because one of the two submits him or herself, and loses his/her independence. So one always has the lead and the other follows. And, well, perhaps there are no problems, but neither is there a manifestation from each that they want to arrive at some equilibrium. And other couples are always fighting! (27).

They enjoy the adventure of parenting bicultural children, and appreciate the friendship with their spouse, and the mutual respect. They feel "invested," "united" or "unified." Hillary said, "I think that we feel that we created a special thing with our union, and we still kind of delight in it." Linda mentioned that:

> We're with each other for reasons like love, and I cherish [Adolfo] and I can learn from [Adolfo]. He teaches me a lot… and I think a lot of people that we know are with their significant other because they don't know what else to do.

Five couples share this sentiment of having grown from their intercultural marriages; several described it specifically as "enriching," whether in terms of their

exposure to other parts of the world and aspects of life, or in terms of their personal growth and positive change as individuals. The well-traveled Rachel appreciates "the unique things that are brought into [her] life, just like when you travel to other countries." Leticia said, "There are still things I don't understand about him, but that makes it fun [chuckle]. That is, I always have something to learn or something to understand." Nicasio said, "The truth is that in a mixed couple there are many motives; many causes for difference – language, culture, religion, economics, politics – there are many. But this also makes there exist more richness and learning opportunities" (28).

Couples therefore echoed the antecedent theme of atypicality (see p. 92) in that they see themselves as special and happier than most. Also, in part due to their ability to navigate conflict in their marriage, couples reinforced their identities as basically normal compared to other couples. "People in general think that a bicultural relationship is difficult. People here in Mexico – I don't know about the United States," said Leticia. "I believe that if I'd have married a Mexican I would have had the same relationship. That is, the fact of being from two cultures doesn't mean more – nor less" (29).

Attribution to Individual Differences

The overarching, general issue to which couples attribute their conflicts may appear to be an antecedent to conflict, not a consequence. While I explore this matter further in the conclusion to this chapter, the following two sub-themes are included as consequences instead of antecedents for two reasons: (a) neither leads to or creates actual conflict (unlike antecedents like external stressors, which do); and (b) the ability to characterize or qualify the general nature or source of one's conflicts only comes *after* having experienced conflict. The tendency to attribute one's marital conflicts to

individual and/or cultural differences (which I explore in the next section) is a product of individuals' meaning-making, *after the fact*. There was no indication from any of the participants that they had these conceptualizations of their partner or their conflicts before initiating the relationship or experiencing conflict; rather, they are a result of post-conflict reflection.

Six couples asserted that their differences are due all or mostly to the individual personalities or psychologies of the partners. In fact, most couples were hard pressed to answer what the main source of their conflicts were. However, I thought their various responses could mostly be characterized as individual personality differences. When I asked if that was a fair interpretation, they agreed. They cited issues such as different points of view, lack of sensitivity, different ways of thinking, different habits, different values, and different ways of being raised or taught by their families of origin. A couple participants mentioned differences in what is perceived as "normal." Other practical concerns like day-to-day events were another common source, as noted earlier in the section on antecedents to conflict (see p. 98; also p. 91).

The couples' sense that their conflicts are rooted more in individual differences, or concerns specific to the partners, rather than culture, was evident in the way they conceptualized or described their relationships. One couple asserted their marital success does not necessarily translate or apply to other mixed couples, because their conflicts come mostly from their differences as individuals, and their experience is unique. Leticia said she experienced more culture shock moving to Guadalajara from another region of Mexico than marrying her U.S. American husband. Iliana said, "I thought it would be

more, how I've felt with him, an American; how he's felt with me that I'm Mexican … it hasn't been, I believe the difference hasn't been much" (30). Karen said:

> Somebody asked me, "Ooh, what's it like,… so how does it feel to get married to a Mexican?' I said, '[Jorge's] Mexican?! I didn't know that! … Like, he's [Jorge] .. it doesn't matter where he lives, what race he is, if he's a man or whatever, he's just a nice person.

Recognition of Cultural Differences

Recognition of specific cultural differences between one and one's spouse, or attributing conflicts primarily to the broad theme of cultural differences, is a by-product of conflict in the same manner as attribution to individual differences. Despite the emphasis most couples placed on individual differences as a factor in conflict, three couples stated that their conflicts stemmed *mainly* from cultural differences. This view is a consequence because it is a post-conflict, reflective assessment. One husband complained of his wife's ethnocentrism. Another husband, Ben, conceptualized many of his differences with Leticia as culturally based. Carlos described aspects of his marriage as a *misterio* ["mystery"] and almost like "dealing with a stranger" (31). He said, "[With a Mexican woman] of course it would be different. It would be not easier, but more …direct, because if she were Mexican you'd know what she's going to respond" (32).

While other couples did not place as much emphasis on cultural differences, or use culture to explain aspects of their partner or relationship, four other couples acknowledged aspects of culture at play in their relationships. Two participants referred to themselves or their partner as "Latin" in some way. Gabriel acknowledged that his preventative tendencies might be due to culture, or having been raised by a military

father; Ben also acknowledged the possible impact of his military father's upbringing on his behavior. Jennifer and Carlos talked articulately about Mexican versus U.S. American conceptualizations of private and public space, and the nature of invitations, as well as Jennifer's planning nature being rooted in culture and more a manifestation of her being "100% *gringa*" than something else stereotypically U.S. American – like eating hamburgers regularly.

Marital Satisfaction

While I did not ask any of the couples outright about their degree of happiness or marital satisfaction, I think some observations about this issue may provide further depth to participants' responses. Seven of the couples appeared to be content. Six of them demonstrated high levels of agreement in their responses, or at least consistency in their general views despite disagreement. They saw their partners in a similar way to how they viewed themselves, and they viewed the relationship very similarly. One couple even gave almost identical responses in their individual interviews. Five couples demonstrated nonverbal rapport, one of the positive styles and skills mentioned in the antecedent communication behaviors section (see p. 102). Three couples complimented each other during the couples interview, and three repeatedly turned to their partners and asked for validation or confirmation in their responses. During the individual interview, two Mexican participants talked explicitly about how happy they were with their partner.

Not all of the content couples were similar in their personalities, affect, or styles. Included in these seven couples were two that reported or demonstrated satisfaction with their partner despite high levels of bickering during the couples interview. While I felt uncomfortable with this behavior, it did not seem to have a negative impact on the

couples, as they saw it as humorous or "playing." In the private interview, one husband explained the bickering by saying, "We discuss a lot. I mean we communicate; that's what's good." Another couple that seemed like an odd match with lots of difficulties also communicated contentment. This demonstrates the variety of personalities and styles of the participants as well as my effort to report their experience of their relationship and conflict rather than my experience of it.

Within the seven content couples there were varying degrees of happiness. Two couples (Ann and Nicasio, and Karen and Jorge) seemed particularly content. This was evident in their nonverbal behavior with one another, rapport, consistency of their answers, and verbal descriptions of their relationship, in which they also reported low incidence of conflict, satisfaction with their partner, and satisfaction with how they manage difference and difficulty. These two couples also said that others perceive them as a happy, role model couple. In two other couples, the husbands (both Mexican) seemed more content with the relationship than their wives (both U.S. American), but overall the pair seemed pretty satisfied. The commonality in wives' complaints was issues of power and authority (see p. 112).

There was one couple that appeared to be somewhat unhappy. I made this evaluation due to their guarded and subdued affect, and report of frequent unresolved or ongoing conflict. Also, the participants did not seem entirely satisfied with their ability to manage this conflict. Similar to the two less-content couples, the U.S. American wife seemed unhappier than the husband, and unequal power and authority also seemed to be the source.

Summary

While positive identity, attribution to individual differences and recognition of cultural differences may all appear to be antecedents to conflict as easily as consequences, I address this issue further in the following section, in which I offer some interpretation of these results and conclusions. Overall, in retrospection, whether seeing their conflicts as caused primarily by individual differences or not, most respondents acknowledged and talked about culture and cultural differences, yet see themselves as participating in a special relationship that transcends culture.

Regardless of how they conceptualize their relationship or characterize their conflict, most of the couples appear to be happy in their marriages, and see themselves on a positive, exciting path together. Several even had unsolicited, encouraging words for other couples. Carlos said, "… culture has had a lot to do with it, and habits, but also understanding and respect above all; respect of her cultural habits and mine too" (33). Ben offered, "Intercultural marriages, if it's the first couple of years, those are the most important. You get by those, usually it's a lot easier. Well, in any marriage, but especially intercultural." Adolfo said:

> In a relationship of two different cultures, I think the first thing that people in that relationship should do is not criticize, that is, not think one is better than the other, nor that one is less or more – that is, leave criticisms outside. Take opinions, and from there construct your own, for the couple …we see both and construct one in the middle of the two. For both (34).

Interpretation and Conclusions

In reflecting on the detailed, textured responses participants gave to the interview questions, and the personal stories they shared about their lives and relationships, I have gained some insight into the ways that U.S. American and Mexican marital partners perceive and describe the ways they manage their conflict. I also have a sense of what successful conflict management and satisfying marriages between U.S. Americans and Mexicans may entail. In this final section, I describe the overall picture that emerged from this study, providing some interpretation of the results summarized in this chapter. I organize this interpretation into six major findings.

As I mentioned at the outset, the assignment of various behaviors and traits to the categories of antecedent, behavior, or consequence was a difficult task, and my choices may even seem arbitrary or debatable. One might even argue that certain themes fit in various categories. For instance, is it having the identity of a normal couple that helps partners prevent or diffuse conflict, or is having the identity of being normal a result of having successfully managed conflict together as a couple? Were the antecedent communication behaviors always antecedents to conflict, or have they developed as consequences of successful or unsuccessful conflict management over time? Is the attribution of conflict to individual or cultural differences a result of conflict management or an antecedent that frames the couples' conflict?

I believe that the answer to these questions is "all of the above." Rather than a linear process or progression of events, I see a cycle of antecedents leading to behaviors, which lead to consequences that reinforce or perhaps change antecedents. I also notice that several themes – atypicality, normalcy, power and authority, similar values,

attribution to individual differences, and recognition of cultural differences – easily fit into *both* antecedent and consequence categories. Perhaps these two categories are not mutually exclusive, but mutually reinforcing, in an ongoing dynamic relationship. Similarly, while the antecedent communication behaviors do set the stage for conflict or create conflict, perhaps they are also consequences of previous conflict, or even learned behaviors that are the consequences of other relational conflict the participants brought into their marriage. Further, perhaps antecedent communication behaviors inform and guide actual conflict behaviors, for example, in terms of indirectness.

This first major finding – the conflict process in the study couples' relationships has a cyclical nature, which involves flexible categories that overlap – may explain why there were far more results in the antecedent theme category than in behaviors or consequences. Many more factors that set the stage for conflict seem to affect what occurs during and after the conflict – and whether conflict even takes place – than the actual strategies and behaviors during and after. The set up seems to be much more vital in determining what happens during conflict, and how. This observation is not based solely on my own interpretation, but also on the fact that participants also had more to say about what leads up to conflict, and spoke about these factors with greater detail and clarity, than what happens during or after. They seemed to have an ability to gauge the emotional temperature of their own moods and the state of the relationship and what might come, but were much less precise about how they managed conflict when it actually happened.

Perhaps the participants are less clear on their strategies during and after conflict because such behaviors depend so heavily on the details – on situation or even instinct.

This was the second major finding – context and situation make all the difference. For example, sometimes one partner apologizes; other times the other. "Disagreements" are perceived and handled in various ways, while "conflicts" are more serious and require different tactics. Perhaps partners perceive a conflict differently in terms of its seriousness or source, adding to the conflict and its uniqueness. The influence of context is also evident in apparent contradictions in some of the partners' responses (e.g., wives tend to be direct communicators, but not in conflict; some partners are calm in general but more animated during conflict).

The participants are aware of the importance of context and situation on their choice of behaviors. Not only did a few sometimes answer questions by saying, "it depends," most, especially U.S. Americans, regularly experience situational roles and changing identities in general. Similar to Tanno's (2004) description of situational ethnic identity, the majority of participants regularly experience being mistaken as a member of their partner's culture (whether due to physical appearance, manner of dress, language, or by association). A few have multiple identities, and the two darker-skinned U.S. Americans that partially identified as Mexican American or Hispanic acknowledged how they are perceived as more U.S. American than Mexican in Mexico, but perhaps closer to Mexican than U.S. American in the United States.

While such matters as racial, ethnic, and national identity may not seem central to issues of conflict, the participants' experience with situational identity and the importance of context may make them more aware of the importance of situation and context in creating and managing conflict. For example, they cited the influence of external factors, like work stress or multiple stressors, on creating a context more conducive to conflict.

They acknowledged that under such conditions, certain things might bother them that normally did not. They also vary their conflict behaviors, particularly conflict management strategies, based on various contextual factors, such as the topic, the seriousness of the issue, who and what was involved, their emotions, and whether the conflict was taking place in public or private. They spoke of consciously "picking battles" based on various contextual and other factors. Following conflict, sometimes one spouse takes initiative to apologize or start resolving the conflict, and sometimes the other, depending on perceived responsibility or other situational needs.

The third finding was that, while interesting to note participants' rich descriptions and explanations of their identities, neither race nor ethnicity had an impact on conflict as perceived by the participants. The differences between the couples were about cultural difference, not race or ethnicity. As explained in the Introduction, I conceive of culture as even less based in essentialist notions of race than ethnicity. Some participants were racially or ethnically similar, yet culturally different. All three of the U.S. Americans that identified all or in part as Hispanic/Hispana/Mexican American demonstrated traits and behaviors that, according to the literature, are more typical of U.S. Americans than Mexicans. In fact, both Gabriel and Linda, the two dark-skinned U.S. Hispanics, explained overtly how Mexicans are different from their own families, or from Hispanics; especially in matters of family, a central Mexican cultural value. Interestingly, the two lighter-skinned Mexicans – Nicasio and especially Rodrigo, who also has blue eyes – do seem to display traits that are seen as more classically U.S. American, such as linear logic, a U.S. American "work ethic," and U.S.-style gender roles. However, in many other ways they are still very "Mexican," and much more so than either of their partners,

even though one of these partners is Ann, who, although blond and blue-eyed, identifies as Hispana because of her half-Spanish heritage and her political orientation.

Fourth, while the differences between partners are more about culture, they think about their relationship and conflict more in micro terms than macro. While almost all the couples notice and acknowledge the influence of cultural differences in their lives and their marriages, many more (six) see individual personality and psychology as their main source of conflict or problems than culture (three). Despite having experienced prejudice based on nationality or physical appearance, or hardships rooted in the inequities between the two nations of the U.S. and Mexico (e.g., harassment by immigration officials, mistreatment and wrongful deportation, disparity in difficulties obtaining visas and jobs), most of the participants very much think in terms of the individual, rather than social structures. For instance, their consciousness of race was more about a physical trait – individual skin color – than identity (especially the Anglo U.S. Americans who had a hard time answering what race they were). Their concept of social class was more about an individual's income than any sort of class consciousness or other class indicators like education level, language use or political interests. Macro social categories like race and class did not seem to have any identity implications for the participants, nor evoke any connection or sense of solidarity with members of similar groups. While several participants, especially Mexicans, are proud of their nationality, most seem to view the world as individuals interacting with other individuals, and not members of groups interacting with members of other groups.

However, when participants talked about individual differences between themselves and their partners, they cited issues like different ways they were raised or

taught, different ways of thinking, habits, values, points of view, and differing ideas of what's normal. These issues are all, in fact, part of what comprise culture. Some participants also contradicted themselves by saying their experience is unique and their relationship very individual, yet offering unsolicited advice to other mixed couples and solutions for how others should resolve conflict. If their experience is so individual and unique, why do they offer advice to others? This disjuncture and lack of consciousness of macro social forces, despite having been directly affected by them, may stem from lack of awareness of what culture is. It may also be an effect of their atypicality. Perhaps to be atypical in any culture one must be relatively self-sufficient and comfortable being different from others – perhaps even an outsider – and therefore more individualistically-oriented. Since being in a mixed marriage is still atypical in both Mexico and the U.S., perhaps it is chosen by more individualistic people from both cultures. An individualistic orientation may make a person more inclined to see herself and other people as mere individuals and less affected by social structures and institutions.

While I saw culture as being a greater factor in couples' differences than they did, the reality is that a dialectic between culture and the individual exists in all phases of these couples' conflict management cycle. This is the fifth major finding – many of the results express a dialectical relationship between communication and culture similar to that advanced by Martin and Nakayama (1999). A dialectic is a tension between two seemingly opposite ideas or phenomena, which exist simultaneously. Martin and Nakayama (1999) suggested that the contradictions in a dialectic work in relation to each other, and are *not* discrete. They described six dialectics that operate in intercultural

interactions: cultural-individual, personal/social-contextual, differences-similarities, static-dynamic, present-future/history-past, and privilege-disadvantage.

Several such dialectics are at work in the couples' conflict management cycles. Not only is there tension between individual and cultural aspects as I mentioned, but also an ongoing negotiation between contextual behaviors and individual tendencies or needs. A static-dynamic dialectic is evident in the ways couples cited changing moods, work stress, and levels of maturity over the years, combined with the constancy of sharing similar values, for example. Couples struggling with power differences enact a privilege-disadvantage dialectic in which they assert power in different ways and proportions according to their perceptions of a situation, their roles, and their degree of agency. Privilege-disadvantage also manifests in the differences between partners in language fluency and their corresponding competence in U.S./English-speaking and Mexican/Spanish-speaking contexts, as well as differing levels of access to economic and political power.

A dialectic between differences and similarities is expressed in other juxtapositions. One such juxtaposition is between cultural differences and value similarities. Couples cited similar values as important in their relationships, and relationships in general, as keeping them together and helping them manage conflict. These similarities help balance their differences in culture, which is perhaps why some couples emphasized how important similar values are, and how minor their cultural differences are by comparison. Another important juxtaposition is differences from others and similarities with others. This is expressed in the dialectic between atypicality and normalcy, both of which play an important role in most couples' identities as healthy,

happy marriages. Participants emphasized both how normal they are, perhaps to maintain connection to others, but also how special and different, perhaps as a source of positive identity, pride, and uniqueness.

Other traits and behaviors also seemed to function as dialectics. For instance, external stressors as conflict catalysts combined with internal emotional stressors or tensions. Husbands could be viewed simultaneously (or situationally) as perceptive/responsive *and* unaware/unresponsive. Mexican partners resisted granting their partners' requests just to please them, but also actively searched for ways to please them indirectly. U.S. American women are both atypically conservative and atypically liberal at the same time. Couples maintain behavioral dialectics between each other in terms of behaviors such as fast-slow and rigid-flexible. The amount of time spent with extended family extends on a continuum from not enough to too much. Even the conflict cycle itself is a dialectic between antecedents and consequences; in that sense, between present and past.

My final major finding was that much of what seems to create marital satisfaction among mixed U.S. American-Mexican couples is competent management of the various dialectics in a mutually satisfactory fashion *for them*. For example, Leticia's mediation skills manage Ben's ethnocentrism, and other values shared and needs met keep Ben's orientation from creating a problem for his wife. Aside from the ability to manage their various tensions in ways that satisfy both of the partners enough, there are five other traits or behaviors that seem to lead to more successful conflict management and more satisfied partners: (a) partners value communication and actively engage in regular communication; (b) partners are bilingual and can competently communicate in each

other's language as well as their own; (c) aside from language competency, partners have similar understandings and definitions of what Hall (1994) calls "kernel images,"[12] such as equality; (d) partners have complementary, not similar, antecedent communication behaviors and conflict behaviors; and (e) partners experience a balance of power. The overall effect of these five traits and behaviors seems to be less frequency of conflict, less intense conflicts, more effective conflict management, and improved relational satisfaction overall.

I sent a draft 20-page executive summary of these results to all study participants by email in late April 2004 and a final version in early June. Both times I encouraged feedback and comments. The executive summary was in English, but included a notation in Spanish that a translation was available upon request. By the end of June 2004, six participants (representing four of the couples) had responded. Their comments were all positive, appreciative, and congratulatory, and they felt the results expressed the essence of their relationship, and an articulate synthesis of their experience.

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[12] A kernel image is a term or concept that cultural communities in conflict view as important, but maintain different ways of understanding the term or interpreting its meaning, such as the notion of "rights" (Hall, 1994).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

It was my purpose to undertake a study that would begin to close a gap in intercultural communication research on conflict between Mexicans and U.S. Americans, and start to bridge the divide between Mexicans and U.S. Americans who find themselves in conflict with each other. I used intercultural marital conflict as an example context, and aimed to examine the ways Mexican and U.S. American partners perceive and describe how they manage interpersonal conflict with each other. The grounded theory approach encourages participant-driven results such as those I sought in this study, and allows for emic understandings and experiences to emerge from data, which can then generate theory. Results may therefore yield unexpected surprises or inspire questions that researchers did not consider before. Such was the case in this study. In this chapter, I first summarize my findings by research question, and place them in the context of the existing literature. Next, I discuss some theoretical and practical implications of this research project. I then offer some thoughts on the study limitations and possible future directions for research, concluding the chapter with some general insights and personal reflection.

Research Questions

In this section, I summarize the basic findings for each of my three sub-research questions in turn. I place my findings in the context of existing literature on romantic relational conflict and intercultural conflict, noting the consistency and inconsistency of

my results with the literature. This section provides context for the following section on theoretical and practical implications of my study.

Antecedents to Conflict

The first research question was: What are the principal issues or antecedents that create and frame interpersonal conflict between U.S. American and Mexican marital partners? Results yielded seven themes: atypicality, normalcy, external stressors, antecedent communication behaviors, culture, power/authority, and similar values. A sense of atypicality serves to unite participant couples and establish their identities, while a feeling of normalcy provides context for their relationships and their conflicts, both of which they see as relatively normal. External stressors are often an antecedent that creates or exacerbates conflict. Negative non-conflict communication styles, skills, and content often lead to conflict, while positive non-conflict communication styles and skills help prevent or minimize it. Culturally based approaches to time and family are common areas of disagreement and conflict, and imbalances in power and authority often merge in conflict, or lead to it. Finally, similar values are a uniting point of departure that serves to prevent or frame conflict.

The two main bodies of literature examined primarily gender and cultural values as antecedents to conflict. My findings were largely consistent with both, but deviated in terms of the intersection of gender and culture. I first address gender, then culture, and then the deviations. First, my study provided no support for the sex stereotypes hypothesis described by Cupach and Canary (1995); there was no apparent relationship between a partner's gender and whether he or she enacted competitive, passive, negative,

or positive behaviors during conflict. Selection of approaches seems based more on context and nature of relationship than gender.

However, my results were similar to findings in other studies. Consistent with Canary and Spitzberg (1987), the women in my study are perceived as more generally appropriate in their responses, as evident in their spouses' descriptions of them as "easy to get along with" and "non-conflictive." Also, most of the wives seem more likely than husbands to regulate the affective balance in the marriage and keep the couples focused on problem solving as Gottman and Levenson (1988) found. In agreement with Acitelli et al. (1993), in my study, wives' understanding of their husbands seems to be related positively to their satisfaction, while husbands' understanding of their wives is less a factor in their satisfaction. However, accurate perception of a partner's behavior seems related to satisfaction for both parties, as Hojjat (2000) found. Participants, particularly husbands, reported frustration when they could not understand or anticipate their partners' responses, and lack of "understanding" was a reported source of conflict.

In terms of culture, Mexicans and U.S. Americans in the present study do not entirely fit within the categories prescribed for them in the literature, but the ways in which they do fit with their culture's general orientation can create conflict. Mexicans in the study seem much more individualistic with independent self-construals than Mexicans generally are characterized, and the U.S. Americans display more collectivistic tendencies than U.S. Americans do generally. Differences in power distance orientations did not come up, nor were Mexican participants' communication patterns as consistent or universal as the literature suggested – there was a great deal of situational and contextual variety. Also, most of the U.S. Americans demonstrated high levels of *respeto* and

simpatía towards their partner, and in general. These are perhaps other examples of the couples' atypicality. Indeed, the couples' family cultures seem focused more towards classically U.S. American values, such as equality, fairness, and efficiency. However, contrary to the literature, U.S. Americans in this study seem much less comfortable with change than Mexicans, witness their "rigidity" and need to plan and stick to plans.

Time and family were two areas in which Mexicans and U.S. Americans in the study fit neatly into the prescribed cultural categories outlined in the literature, and both are areas of conflict for the couples. Mexican participants are much more oriented towards accommodating extended family and spending lots of time with them, which is something most U.S. American participants feel uncomfortable or frustrated with. The U.S. Americans, on the other hand, like to plan, have organization, and think into the future, which causes tension for present-oriented Mexicans with a more fluid sense of time.

My findings for antecedents deviated from the literature in the sense that culture mitigated the effect of gender, and therefore did not support some of the existing romantic relational literature on gender. For example, while wives' understanding of their husbands seems more related to their satisfaction than the reverse, Mexican husbands seem to value and want to understand their wives more than Acitelli et al.'s (1993) findings suggest. Husbands, especially Mexican husbands, seem as accurate as wives in evaluating their partner's conflict behaviors, in contradiction with Hojjat's (2000) results. Also contradictory to Hojjat, patterns of assertion and passivity do not seem related to gender, but culture. U.S. Americans in the present study, but not all women, seem more likely to assert themselves during conflict, and the Mexicans, but not all men, tend to

become negative and passive when dissatisfied. I concur with Christensen and Heavey (1990), who conducted their study on White U.S. Americans, that men tend to withdraw, but not necessarily due to greater power and a desire to maintain the status quo. Since most of the husbands in this study were Mexican, their negativity or passivity could likely be a function of culture rather than gender, and for reasons of relational harmony, or mutual or other-face than power. Mexican women use withdrawing strategies too, perhaps to assert or re-assert power. Withdrawing may therefore be a power strategy, used by members of both genders depending on context.

In summary, with regards to current literature on conflict antecedents, the results of the present research support several other studies on gender differences in conflict with the exception of the sex stereotypes hypothesis. In terms of cultural values as an antecedent, study participants do not always fit neatly in categories described in the literature, but when they do, as in orientations towards time and family, their differences lead to conflict. Where gender and culture intersect, culture mitigates the effect of gender; in this study, Mexican males in particular deviated from other findings on husbands' typical behaviors.

Conflict Behavior

The second research question was: What are the different strategies employed by U.S. American and Mexican marital partners in successfully managing interpersonal conflict with each other? Four subcategories of conflict behavior emerged from the interviews: emotions, direct/indirect communication styles, conflict management strategies, and post-conflict behavior. Most couples in this study were complementary in their varying levels of expressiveness (one expressive and one subdued), and their

tendencies to pursue or withdraw (one of each). However, Mexicans' indirect communication styles tend to exacerbate conflict with their U.S. American partners. During such conflict, the couples employ a variety of conflict management strategies, but favor prevention, talking, apologies and compromise. After resolving their conflict or ending an argument, most of them resume their normal lives and communication patterns without a make up period.

My findings corroborated or enhanced existing literature on conflict behavior, particularly around conflict styles. All but one of the most common strategies reported by the participants fit within the styles of the dual concern model (Blake & Mouton, 1964): talking and apologizing (integrating), compromising, and giving in (accommodating). Participants seem to favor integrating styles that also fall in the "rationality" cluster proposed by Straus (1979). There was one strategy that does not fit, however: prevention. This is not an avoiding tactic of conflict behavior, but rather a proactive approach to minimizing or eliminating antecedents to conflict.

My findings concurred with other literature on the association of various styles with satisfaction, and people's evaluations of different styles. In accordance with Kurdek (1994a), the more satisfied study participant couples frequently use positive problem-solving tactics, and infrequently use conflict engagement or withdrawal. The one dissatisfied couple in my study uses frequent withdrawal, which, according to Kurdek, leads to decreased satisfaction. My results were also consistent with Sereno et al.'s (1987) finding that nonassertive tactics are rated more highly than assertive ones – and especially for Mexicans. Also, neither Mexicans nor U.S. Americans in the study preferred dominating styles. Furthermore, my findings were similar to Kurdek's (1994b)

connection between conflict over power and low relationship satisfaction, but I did not find that conflicts over sex or intimacy are a major topic of conflict.

The Mexicans in the present research do, indeed, seem to be more avoidant, non-confrontational, collaborative, and self-effacing than the U.S. Americans, with high concern for other- and mutual-face. This supports results of other studies (Gabrielidis et al., 1997; Kagan et al., 1982; Kim & Leung, 2000; and Oetzel et al., 2003). Indeed, withdrawal and avoidance among study participants do not seem to reflect low concern for self or other, but rather concern for both and a desire to remove oneself from an interaction before becoming "offensive." Also important to note is that, similar to Kagan et al. (1982), I found no differences in conflict style between Anglo U.S. Americans and Mexican Americans in their interactions with Mexican spouses.

In summary, my findings on conflict behavior corroborated existing literature on conflict styles and the relationship of conflict styles to satisfaction. Reported strategies fit within the dual concern model with the exception of the "prevention" style. Results also supported literature on the general perception of different conflict styles, and style preferences for U.S. Americans and Mexicans, as well as the emerging notion that withdrawal and avoidance do not necessarily express low concern for self or other.

Consequences of Conflict

The third research question was: What are the consequences of interpersonal conflict for U.S. American and Mexican marital partners? Three major themes emerged: positive identity, attribution to individual differences, and recognition of cultural differences. In reflecting on their conflicts after the fact, most couples see them as having been caused by individual, not cultural, differences. But whether they see their

conflicts as rooted in cultural differences or not, most respondents acknowledged and talked about culture and cultural differences. They see themselves as fortunate, and as participating in a special relationship better than most, that transcends culture.

Existing literature on conflict consequences centers around matters of communication competence, communication satisfaction, and the impact of conflict on marital satisfaction. In terms of competence, similar to Johnson et al. (2002), in this study Mexican Americans and Anglo U.S. Americans were more similar to each other in their perceptions of competence than members of either group was with Mexicans. Consistent with work by Collier et al. (1986) and Hecht et al. (1990) on communication competence among Mexican Americans, Mexicans, too, seem to value cultural validation and a feeling that their worldview and values are shared and accepted as important, perhaps even more than the U.S. Americans in the study. This might be a function of the fact the couples live in Guadalajara, which may mean Mexican participants feel it is even more important for their spouses to "put on slippers rather than carpet the world"; that is, their foreign spouses should understand and accept the Mexican worldview and adapt to their surroundings. In accordance with McGinn et al. (1973) and Collier et al. (1986), Mexicans in this study highly value the expression of feelings and relational validation. However, most of the U.S. Americans, who were mostly women, also demonstrate these qualities.

Overall, perception of communication competence or differing standards of competence do not seem to play a major role in participant couples' conflict cycles. Communication and marital satisfaction were more salient consequences. In accordance with Rivera Aragón and Díaz Loving (2002), positive love styles and behaviors seem to

increase satisfaction, while negative power styles reduce it. And despite the fact that none of the study couples have separated, there is some support for Kurdek's (1994a) assertion that infrequent positive problem solving and frequent conflict engagement predict dissolution, since the dissatisfied couple in this study experiences both frequent conflict and lack of satisfying problem solving. Since participant couples that actively prevent or face conflicts demonstrate satisfaction, results appear to support the finding of Gottman and Krokoff (1989) that conflict engagement is functional over time, but only if that engagement is constructive, integrative, and demonstrates concern for mutual face.

Overall, the results of the present study do not reflect the focus of existing literature on the development or perception of communication competence as a consequence of conflict, although findings do support a few previous studies on competence. Communication satisfaction and marital satisfaction were two areas in which results of this research meshed with previous findings on conflict consequences, and corroborated those findings.

<center>Implications</center>

Having placed my basic findings in the context of the existing literature, I now offer some thoughts about their contribution to the current body of knowledge. Since I took a grounded theory methodological approach, part of my task is to begin to create new theory out of the data in my study. At the same time, as a scholar with critical leanings interested in local/emergent meanings, this research must offer practical applications to improving people's lives if it is to have substantial merit. I therefore discuss theoretical implications first, followed by practical implications.

Theoretical

In the conclusion of my results chapter, I presented six major findings of the present study. They are: (a) the conflict process in the study couples' relationships is cyclical, with flexible categories that overlap; (b) context and situation make all the difference in conflict behaviors; (c) neither race nor ethnicity had an impact on conflict as perceived by the participants; (d) while the differences between partners are more about culture, they think about their relationship and conflict more in micro terms than macro; (e) many of the results express a dialectical relationship between communication and culture; and (f) much of what seems to create marital satisfaction among mixed U.S. American-Mexican couples is competent management of the various dialectics in a mutually satisfactory fashion *for them.* Drawing on these findings, there are four major points my study makes, which can contribute to theory development.

First, as Deetz (2001) implies, local/emergent meanings and processes defy discrete categorizations. Participants in this study had a difficult time classifying their conflicts, their relationships, and themselves. Many participants spoke of having contextual identities that changed depending on where they were and with whom. They acknowledged the importance of various factors in their conflict and relationship, such as context and external stressors. They resisted categorization into any one conflict style or cultural orientation, often adapting to their surroundings and the situation; most participants used different styles and sometimes even seemed contradictory in their responses. Also, participants' conflict process itself defied categories, manifesting as a mutually reinforcing cycle rather than a linear progression.

This complexity and appearance of occasional contradiction leads to the second theoretical point: the concept of dialectics appears to be a highly useful tool in describing intercultural relationships, marital conflict, and conflict processes. Not only do my findings corroborate Martin and Nakayama's (1999) six dialectics and the prevalence and importance of dialectics in general for the study participants, they lend credence to the value of a dialectical perspective. Martin and Nakayama (1999) advocated a dialectical perspective that does the following: (a) engages multiple paradigms; (b) views intercultural communication as a dynamic process; (c) emphasizes the holistic *relationships between* aspects and persons over individual aspects and persons themselves; and (d) requires holding two contradictory ideas simultaneously, to transcend simplistic dichotomies.

It was through adopting a dialectical perspective that the complexity, diversity and contextuality of the study participants' experiences could be given full expression. Not only did my findings necessitate taking a dynamic, holistic, multiple paradigm approach such as that which Martin and Nakayama (1999) described, they suggest that the reality of intercultural interactions defy discrete categorizations and that a dialectical perspective is vital in examining the subtle nuances of conflict communication, particularly intercultural conflict.

My third theoretical point is that culture may be a more salient site of difference and source of conflict than either gender or race/ethnicity. As I described in the Results chapter and in an earlier section of this Discussion chapter, the two U.S. American participants of Mexican American or Hispanic race and ethnicity are more culturally similar to Anglo U.S. Americans than Mexicans. Also, results from research conducted

on marital or relational conflict with White U.S. American participants did not always apply to participants in the present study, where there seemed to be more consistency among members of the same culture/nationality than gender.

Fourth, despite macro influences on their relationships, individuals may see themselves and their partners primarily as *individuals*, not cultural beings, in their intercultural relational conflict. Even though the research participants experience ethnocentrism, prejudice, stereotyping, and the adverse effects of certain immigration and international policies, they continue to see themselves and their partners primarily as individuals, and less as members or representatives of groups. Even the Mexicans are generally this way. This may be due to the influence of the current global political climate; lack of awareness, reflection, or sociological imagination; or lack of savvy about what culture is, since many of the issues couples cited as caused or contributing to conflict are cultural in nature. Whatever the reason, this orientation – despite profound differences between members of the pairs in culture, language, and even race or ethnicity in some – is an interesting one.

Practical

In additional to the theoretical, there are four practical implications for this research. First of all, the study supports the notion that intercultural marriages can not only be successful, but thrive. Anyone contemplating an intercultural marriage, particularly between a U.S. American and a Mexican, may be encouraged by the results of this study. Second, those already in such a relationship may see themselves in these results and be heartened to know there are cultural patterns at work that may illuminate problems and reduce anxiety in partners who think their conflicts are only about the

individual quirks of the partners. These effects may aid readers in more successfully managing their own relational conflict. Along those lines, individuals may find helpful the five traits or behaviors I described earlier that seem to lead to more successful conflict management and more satisfied partners. They were: (a) partners value communication and actively engage in regular communication; (b) partners are bilingual and can competently communicate in each other's language as well as their own; (c) aside from language competency, partners have similar understandings and definitions of "kernel images"; (d) partners have complementary, not similar, antecedent communication behaviors and conflict behaviors; and (e) partners experience a balance of power.

Third, my findings corroborate the ten suggestions that Romano (2001) outlined as "factors for success" in her popular handbook, *Intercultural marriage: Promises and pitfalls*. Those ten are: (a) commitment to the relationship; (b) ability to communicate; (c) sensitivity to each other's needs; (d) a liking for the other's culture; (e) flexibility; (f) solid, positive self-image; (g) love as the main marital motive; (h) common goals; (i) spirit of adventure; and (j) sense of humor. Participants demonstrated all these qualities, and the more they emulated these qualities and behaviors, the more satisfied they seemed to be. In fact, the dissatisfied couple was lacking in a few of these areas, namely ability to communicate, sensitivity to each other's needs, and common goals. This shows how a pattern of what entails successful conflict resolution and marital satisfaction in intercultural unions may be emerging in not only the academic literature, but also in testimonies of people's experience.

Fourth, since a major finding of this study was that satisfied Mexican-U.S. American couples competently manage their conflict dialectics in a way that is mutually

satisfactory for them, it appears that ongoing communication and acceptance of the changing dynamic of a relationship are essential for partners in such an intercultural relationship. Since dialectics are by nature ever shifting, this type of relationship is a moving target that requires regular awareness, attention, communication, adaptation, and care. While such attention requires initiative and work, one only need turn to the study participants' testimonies to realize this investment pays off in a more vibrant, fulfilling relationship.

Limitations

My study was limited in four ways that affected my ability to draw decisive conclusions from the data. Those four areas are: method, role of researcher, interview protocol, and sample. First of all, my method was limited in that I had access to participants for a short time within a relatively brief period. Ninety minutes to three hours of conversation do not likely represent a couple's relationship or conflict in its entire breadth or depth. Second, because of the nature of my method, my role as a researcher may have affected the results. My racial, ethnic, gender, and class identity, which I described in the methods chapter (see p. 79), may have influenced participants' responses in some way; for example, by producing a social desirability effect in which participants give answers they think I, as the researcher, want, or to make themselves look good. Also, although I speak Spanish with native-speaker fluency, it is my second language, and so I may not have noticed certain linguistic and cultural subtleties expressed in Spanish.

Third, there were two questions that should have been included in the interview protocol. A question asking participants about their degree of marital satisfaction or

happiness would have been useful in qualifying the various couples' levels of satisfaction vis-à-vis their conflict management cycles. Having more information about this issue would have provided more context, and a better way to evaluate the effect of various aspects of conflict on the parties involved. Also, since there was a disjuncture between participants' attribution of their conflicts primarily to individual differences, and my interpretation of them being more culturally-based, asking participants how they defined "culture" might have shed some light on their ability to recognize the influence of culture on their relationships, and describe their individual differences in cultural terms, yet still perceive their conflicts as due mainly to individual differences.

The final limitation was the size and skew of the sample. Eight couples are hardly representative of all U.S. American-Mexican marriages, even those in a limited space such as Guadalajara. The participants were overwhelmingly well educated and middle class, and most of them are educators or employed in educational settings. My method also favored certain personality types, namely communicative, verbal, extroverted individuals. It is unlikely that many introverted or shy people would volunteer to be interviewed about their private lives by a total stranger. By the same token, my study favored happier couples; dissatisfied couples with major conflicts would be unlikely to volunteer for this type of study. In fact, one of my contacts told me that several wives she knew were interested in participating, but could not convince their husbands: "Several women said, 'Well, we don't communicate, so they would be short interviews.'" (J. Evans, personal communication, December 12, 2003). Another said, "Mostly for us, communication is me talking and him pretending to pay attention. I hear this is kind of

universal." (J. Madrigal, personal communication, December 10, 2003). It is interesting to note that most of these women were U.S. American wives of Mexican husbands.

The final bias in my sample was gender. Contrary to what one might expect, it was very hard to locate couples in Guadalajara in which the husband was U.S. American and the wife Mexican. One couple explained this by saying the couples they had met over the years in Mexico in which a U.S. American man married a Mexican woman usually moved back to the United States. This was evident in my participants as well – out of the two couples in which the husband was U.S. American, one was preparing to move to the United States. When I shared my observation with a Mexican friend of mine in Guadalajara, he agreed this is the trend, saying when his sister met a *gringo*, they moved to the United States (J. Trujillo, personal communication, January 3, 2004). Perhaps couples go wherever the primary wage earner feels he or she has better opportunities, or wherever the person with greater power feels more at home.

Future Directions

While the results and implications of my study are exciting, there is plenty that can still be done to provide further insight on conflict between U.S. Americans and Mexicans, including marital partners. Conflict in mixed marriages between U.S. Americans and Mexicans is only one context in which relations between these two groups and their nations play out, but it may be a starting point. Unsuccessful intercultural interactions often manifest as conflict, so investigating intercultural conflict may inform what it takes to make intercultural relations more successful and mutually beneficial. As explained in the Introduction, the intimacy, investment, proximity and mutual dependence of intercultural marriage may serve as a metaphor for relations

between two cultures or nations such as the United States and Mexico. But while results from the current study cannot necessarily be applied to the macropolitical dynamic between the two countries, they do demonstrate that there exist differences between the two nations' cultures, numerous opportunities for misunderstanding and conflict between individuals from these cultures, and hope that the divide can be bridged. With the present research, the gap in intercultural research on conflict between U.S. Americans and Mexicans is beginning to close, but it is still wide. Intercultural marriage is only a starting point; other contexts must be examined and other stories told. Perhaps it is true, as Gabrielidis et al. (1997) say, that "some of the most severe problems in [macro] intercultural relations arise as a consequence of interpersonal conflicts" (p. 661) but at this point it is not certain, nor is it clear how this process might work.

Still, there are a few things I did in the present study that I think researchers attempting to address similar questions to mine would do well to duplicate or continue. First, examining *inter*cultural dynamics and not just intracultural or cross-cultural differences is crucial. What occurs during conflict with culturally different others may be very different from what happens during conflict within one's group. Second, while time-consuming, qualitative methods of data collection and analysis can be very rewarding in the detail and texture they provide, which may provide more complete representations of people's lived reality than quantitative methods. Third, in conducting research on intercultural interactions, especially with participants culturally different from oneself, being transparent about one's identity and reflexive during all stages is vital to obtaining the truest results possible.

There are also some areas I think future researchers should explore in more depth. Scholars should consider the four theoretical points I described in the Implications section: (a) local/emergent meanings and processes may defy categorizations; (b) a dialectical perspective may be highly effective in examining intercultural conflict processes; (c) culture may be a more salient site of difference and conflict than gender or race/ethnicity; and (d) individuals in intercultural relationships may view themselves and their partners as individuals first and cultural beings second. All of these points suggest that researchers engage in an active dialectical dialogue with themselves, their research, and their "co-researchers" (study participants). They indicate the importance of staying attentive, open to possibilities, and willing to challenge common conceptualizations of basic phenomena such as culture, and common tendencies such as the categorization of people and their behaviors. Just like satisfied partners in an intercultural marriage, conscientious scholars must be mindful, vigilant, and proactive.

Beyond those four theoretical points, there are a few more considerations for future research in intercultural conflict, particularly that between Mexicans and U.S. Americans. First, individuals' preference for prevention as a conflict resolution style may not fit with the dual-concern typology of conflict styles. I think more study of what prevention entails and how it is enacted may complete the picture of how satisfied intercultural couples manage their conflict. Second, my findings on communication consequences did not mesh with the literature in terms of the focus on competence. Either more study is needed specifically on communication competence and satisfaction in U.S. American-Mexican marital partners, or there needs to be more examination of identity and attribution as important consequences of conflict, as I found.

Third, certain specific topics or questions might need to be explored more in future research. I did not ask couples about sex or intimacy, but this was something Kurdek (1994b) found to be a major factor in marital conflict, and one of my male participants asked why I did not ask about sex. Also, I did not ask couples to define culture, which might be important in talking about cultural differences – we used the vocabulary without defining it. Further, it might be interesting to explore in more depth *why* couples tended see themselves as individuals first, and cultural beings second.

Finally, my results emphasize the fact that culture is an essential part of who people are and how they communicate. Culture affects communication and conflict, perhaps even more than gender or race/ethnicity. Scholars must therefore take care to ascertain and report their participants' race, ethnicity, and cultures, as these variables affect results. Also, researchers must be vigilant of the possible effects of individuals' cultural differences on their communication research findings, even between members of the same race or ethnicity. This includes resisting racist and ethnocentric tendencies to extrapolate conclusions drawn from research conducted in the United States and/or on Anglos to different groups, whether within the current borders of the U.S. or beyond.

<div align="center">Final Conclusions and Reflections</div>

I believe that in academia, as in many other areas of life, we find ourselves drawn to people and projects that can help us understand something about ourselves, resolve an issue in our lives, or even heal. While not all scholars may realize this or acknowledge it, I strive to be self-reflexive in my work, and maintain awareness of why I am interested in certain topics, as well as how they affect my life. Research, to me, is a highly personal pursuit. I have been well aware during this project, and my entire program of study over

the last two years, that one reason I am drawn to study communication and conflict is that neither was handled well in my family of origin, which is why, as an adult, I actively work on improving my skills in both areas. I also take an optimistic approach to both, believing that conflict is an opportunity for growth, and that we humans have the potential to meet our needs and live together in true peace rooted in justice despite our many differences. I believe this potential can be realized in large part through communication.

In retrospect, having listened to the participants in this study share their stories and their lives, and having reflected on their experiences by writing this thesis, I come away with a greater understanding of my own life, movement toward resolution of some of my issues, and renewed optimism. I could not help but compare my own experiences with marriage and intercultural relationships with what I read in the literature, and with what I heard and observed from my participants. While I do not regret the fact that my own marriage ended, I delighted in the couples I talked with, who are proud of their relationship and content with their partner. I now understand better why my relationships failed, and I am able to recognize patterns and dynamics I did not see clearly before. While this gives me some relief from taking full responsibility for the state or demise of my relationships, it also gives me a sense of what to look for, and renewed hope that true connection, and a sustainable, fulfilling, mutually beneficial relationship can exist between people.

I also have renewed optimism that such relationship and communion can exist between people even from very different cultures such as Mexico and the United States. Indeed, if, as Mexicans like to say, *cada cabeza es un mundo* – each head is its own

world – then every marriage is intercultural. I hope that my research here is only the beginning; that more scholars will begin to look at relationships between Mexicans and U.S. Americans more carefully, so that we can all move together through the centuries to come in more of a mutual, understanding, respectful partnership than we have in the past.

For my part, this project has reinforced another tendency that has been growing inside me in the last two years. While I came to the University of New Mexico with the clear goal in mind to study intercultural conflict, and on this specific thesis topic, I found myself becoming more interested in identity than conflict. During this thesis project, I was fascinated by participants' descriptions of their various racial, ethnic, and national identities – how and where they enact those identities, and how they are forced upon them. I noticed how themes like atypicality and normalcy are really about couples' identities – individually and collectively – and how profound those identities are in their relationship and conflict management.   I also noticed that the individual-cultural dialectic and various attributions to different sources of conflict were also about ascribed and avowed identity. Gender identity played out in terms of conflict over proper roles, responsibilities, tasks, and power. Finally, positive identity was one of the byproducts of successful conflict management.

Who we are, who others think we are, and who we want to be, are all integral aspects of communication, relationship, and even culture. These are matters of identity. It's no surprise to me that, as I enter a new phase of my life, these are the questions – both academic and personal – that I ponder. But wherever this next phase takes me, I feel more confident in my ability to navigate these issues, and more optimistic about the

possible outcomes, in part due to my experience with this research project. For that, I am

grateful to the participants, and to all who walked with me on this leg of my journey.

Appendix A

In search of mixed couples …
En busca de parejas mixtas…

¿Le gustaría participar en una investigación nueva que pretende descubrir cómo los miembros de las parejas mixtas (estadounidenses y mexicano/as) se comunican uno con el otro?

Estaré haciendo entrevistas de parejas en Guadalajara entre el 16 de diciembre hasta el 8 de enero para esta investigación. Me gustaría hablar con Ud. si forma parte de una relación mixta (estadounidense y mexicano/a). No tienen que estar casados, pueden tener hijos o no, y pueden formar una pareja heterosexual u homosexual. No importa la duración de su relación. Los dos tienen que estar disponibles para dos entrevistas entre las fechas que estaré en Guadalajara.

Si está interesada/o en participar, o si quiere más información,
ifavor de contactarse conmigo!

Lic. Susan "Susana" Rinderle
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* * * * *

Would you like to participate in a new study that is trying to discover how mixed (American and Mexican) couples communicate with each other?

I will be doing interviews of couples in Guadalajara from December 16 to January 8 for this study. I would like to talk to you if you are in a mixed (American and Mexican) relationship. You do not need to be married, you may have children or not, and you may be a heterosexual or homosexual couple. It doesn't matter how long you have been together. Both of you must be available for two interviews during the dates I will be in Guadalajara.

If you are interested in participating or would like to know more, please contact me!

Susan "Susana" Rinderle
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Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA
sjrinderle@hotmail.com, tel. +1-505-980-3320

Appendix B

Participant biographical information sheet/ Hoja de información biográfica

Apellidos: _____ Nombre: _____

Domicilio: _____

Teléfonos: _____Email:_____

Sexo: _____ Edad: _____Fecha de nacimiento: _____

Lugar de nacimiento: _____

Raza/etnidad/nacionalidad (cómo se identifica): _____

Idioma natal/principal: _____

Profesión/carrera: _____

Nombre de pareja: _____

Raza/etnidad/nacionalidad (cómo se identifica): _____

Idioma natal/principal: _____

Profesión/carrera: _____

Duración de relación: _____

Tipo/naturaleza de relación: _____

Lugar de mayor residencia: _____

Hijos? Nombre, sexo, edad: _____

_____

Fecha de hoy: _____ Fecha(s) de entrevista(s): _____

Idioma(s): _____

Lugar(es) de entrevista(s): _____

_____

Appendix C
Interview protocol: couples

Orientation
- Make sure consent form is signed.
- Explain study again.
- Assure anonymity and confidentiality (especially of individual interviews).
- Confirm the amount of time needed is all right.
- Verify recording is OK. Take photo!!
- Remind that I will provide a copy of results later.
- NOTE: make notes about setting and nonverbals!!!

Questions

FIRST: Complete biographical sheet.

1. Tell me about your relationship: How did you meet? How long have you been together?

2. Do you have disagreements/arguments/challenges in your relationship? How often? Do these lead to conflict?

3. Is there a difference between a "disagreement," an "argument" and a "conflict"? [Ascertain which term the participants prefer.]

4. Tell me about a typical conflict/disagreement/argument.

    a. What caused it? How did you manage it? Was it resolved? How?

5. Tell me about a time you resolved a conflict/disagreement/argument.

    a. How did you resolve it? Is this typical?

    b. Explore a conflict/disagreement/argument that was *not* resolved.

6. Tell me what usually causes conflicts/disagreements/arguments between you.

7. What usually happens during conflicts/disagreements/arguments?

8. What usually happens *after* conflicts/disagreements/arguments?

9. How is your relationship like other couples you know?

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your relationship?

DEBRIEF: Questions? Comments? Experience of the interview?

Appendix D

Protocolo de entrevista: parejas

Orientación general

- Asegurar que se firmó el formulario de acuerdo.
- Explicar de nuevo los detalles de la investigación.
- Asegurarles a los participantes que este proceso sera anónimo y confidencial (sobre todo las entrevistas individuales).
- Confirmar que la cantidad de tiempo necesario está bien.
- Verificar si está bien grabar la entrevista. <u>Tomar foto</u>!!
- Recordarles que les proveeré una copia de los resultados después.
- OJO: Hacer apuntes sobre el ambiente y los "nonverbals"!!

Preguntas

<u>PRIMERO: Completar la hoja de información biográfica</u>

1. Platíquenme sobre su relación: ¿Cómo se conocieron? ¿Cuánto tiempo llevan juntos?

2. ¿Tienen desacuerdos/pleitos/problemas en su relación? ¿Con qué frecuencia? ¿Llegan a ser conflictos?

3. ¿Hay una diferencia entre un desacuerdo, un pleito y un conflicto? [Averiguar cuál término los participantes prefieren usar.]

4. Platíquenme sobre un conflicto/desacuerdo/pleito típico entre Uds.

   a. ¿Qué fue la causa? ¿Cómo lo manejaron? ¿Se resolvió? Cómo?

5. Platíquenme sobre una vez cuando resolvieron un conflicto/desacuerdo/pleito entre Uds.

   a. ¿Cómo lo resolvieron? ¿Es típico eso?

   b. Explorar un desacuerdo/pleito/conflicto que *no* fue resuelto.

6. Platíquenme qué es lo que causa los conflictos/desacuerdos/pleitos entre Uds., por lo regular.

7. ¿Qué es lo que pasa entre Uds. durante los conflictos/desacuerdos/pleitos, por lo regular?

8. Por lo regular, ¿qué sucede *después* de los conflictos/desacuerdso/pleitos?

9. ¿Cómo es su relación parecida a las relaciones entre otras parejas que Uds. conocen?

10. ¿Hay algo más que quisieran contarme sobre su relación?

"<u>DEBRIEF</u>": ¿Preguntas? ¿Comentarios? ¿Su experiencia con la entrevista?

Appendix E

Interview protocol: individual

<u>**Orientation**</u>
- <u>Assure anonymity and confidentiality</u>.
- Confirm the amount of time needed is all right.
- Verify recording is OK.
- NOTE: make notes about setting and nonverbals!!!
- Ask if the participant has any questions about the study.

<u>**Questions**</u>

1. Do you have anything you want to tell me that you didn't talk about during our first interview?

2. Is there anything you want to change or clarify about what you said in our first interview? Anything you want to add?

3. What do you think is the main challenge you face in communicating with your partner? What is easiest about communicating with your partner?

4. What do you think is the main source of most of the disagreements/arguments/conflicts in your relationship? [Race/ethnicity? Gender? Culture? Class? Education level? Something else?]

5. Are you able to resolve your disagreements/arguments/conflicts with your partner effectively most of the time? Why or why not?

6. How do you identify yourself racially? Ethnically? What is your nationality?

7. How do other people usually identify you – racially? Ethnically? Nationality?

8. Is there anything else you would like to say?

<u>DEBRIEF</u>

Appendix F
Protocolo de entrevista: individual

<u>Orientación general</u>
- <u>Asegurarle que este proceso sera anónimo y confidencia</u>.
- Confirmar que la cantidad de tiempo necesario está bien.
- Verificar si está bien grabar la entrevista.
- OJO: Hacer apuntes sobre el ambiente y los "nonverbals"!!
- Preguntar si el participante tiene algunas preguntas sobre la investigación.

<u>Preguntas</u>

1. ¿Tiene algo que quisiera contarme que no platicó durante nuestra primera entrevista?

2. ¿Hay algo que quisiera cambiar o clarificar de lo que dijo en la primera entrevista? ¿Hay algo que quisiera agregar?

3. En su opinion, ¿cuál es el reto principal que Ud. enfrenta en comunicarse con su pareja? ¿Cuál es el aspecto más fácil de comunicarse con su pareja?

4. En su opinion, ¿cuál es la fuente principal de la mayoría de los desacuerdos/pleitos/conflictos en su relación? [¿Raza? ¿Grupo étnico? ¿Clase social? ¿Nivel de preparación? ¿Algo más?]

5. ¿Puede resolver los desacuerdos/pleitos/conflictos con su pareja de una manera eficaz la mayoría del tiempo? ¿Por qué o por qué no?

6. ¿Cómo se identifica Ud. en cuanto a raza? ¿Grupo étnico? ¿Cuál es su nacionalidad?

7. ¿Cómo es que la gente lo/la identifique por lo regular – en cuanto a raza, groupo étnico, nacionalidad?

8. ¿Hay algo más que quisiera mencionar?

<u>DEBRIEF</u>

Appendix G

Informed Consent to Participate in Research
The University of New Mexico
Department of Communication and Journalism

Dear Participant,
You are invited to take part in a research study. Before beginning, please read and sign the following statement of consent to participate.

Purpose of Research:
Researcher Susan "Susana" Rinderle is a graduate student in the Communication & Journalism Department at the University of New Mexico. She is a bilingual, bicultural California native pursuing her M.A. in intercultural communication with a focus on U.S. Anglo-Mexican conflict. This study is the basis of Ms. Rinderle's Master's thesis, and is intended to shed light on how mixed Mexican and U.S. Anglo couples perceive and describe the ways they successfully resolve interpersonal conflict with each other, including what contributes or leads to conflict, what happens during conflict and how it is resolved. Since there is little research on the dynamics between U.S. Americans and Mexicans, especially around conflict resolution, this research has the potential to be groundbreaking and exciting for everyone involved.

Confidentiality:
All information you provide will be maintained in a confidential manner. Your identity will not be connected with your interview responses in any way, and when the results of the study are reported, you will be given a different name to protect your identity. Information about you (notes and tape recordings) will not be used by anyone or released to any person or organization other than Susana Rinderle, and only for the purposes stated above. Demographic data will be gathered for the completion of the study. Examples of demographic data include your age, profession, birthplace, etc. You are not under any obligation to answer any question you do not wish to.

Participation:
Participation in the study is completely your choice. At any time you may choose to withdraw from the study or stop the interview. You will be asked to participate in two interviews: one with your partner, which will last about an hour, and one alone on another day, which will take about 30 minutes. Ms. Rinderle will be willing to answer any questions you have at any time about the study and the interview questions. You will also be tape recorded and photographed, with your permission. You may decline the photographing or stop the tape recording at any time. Photographs will not be used for any purpose, other than for the researcher's reference, without your permission. All recordings will be destroyed within a year of the interview. There will be no charge or compensation for your participation in the study. **There are no known psychological or physical health risks involved in your participation in these interviews.**

Contact Information:
If you have any questions or concerns about the research or would like to receive a copy of the final research report please contact Susana Rinderle at (505) 980-3320 or

sjrinderle@hotmail.com, or: The University of New Mexico, Communication and Journalism, MSCO 32240, Albuquerque NM, 87131, (505) 277-3253. You may also contact Dr. Enrique Sánchez Ruíz, Universidad de Guadalajara, tel. 33-38-25-49-91.   If you have any other concerns or complaints about your rights as a participant, contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of New Mexico, Professor José Rivera, Scholes Hall, Room 255, Albuquerque NM, 87131, (505) 277-2257.

I understand the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in the study. I have been provided a copy of this form.

Participant's name _____**Signature** _____**Date**_____
(please print)

****

For researcher only:

In my judgment, the participant is voluntarily and knowingly providing informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to provide informed consent to participate in the research study.

Name of researcher: <u>Susana Rinderle</u> **Signature** _____ **Date**_____

Appendix H

Acuerdo informado para participar en la investigación
The University of New Mexico
Department of Communication and Journalism

Estimado Participante,
Está Ud. invitado/a a participar en una investigación universitaria. Antes de comenzar, favor de leer y firmar el siguiente acuerdo de participación.

Propósito de la investigación:
La investigadora Susan "Susana" Rinderle es una estudiante de postgrado en la Facultad de Comunicación y Periodismo de la Universidad de Nuevo México en los Estado Unidos. Es originaria del estado de California, es bilingüe y bicultural, y está terminando su maestría en comunicación intercultural con un enfoque en el conflicto entre estadounidenses (Anglos) y mexicanos. Esta investigación provee la base de la tésis de maestría de la Lic. Rinderle, y tiene la meta de mostrar cómo las parejas mixtas estadounidenses (Anglos)-mexicanos perciben y describen las maneras que resuelven el conflicto o desacuerdo interpersonal entre ellos, incluyendo qué es lo que causa o contribuye a los conflictos/desacuerdos, qué es lo que sucede durante los conflictos/desacuerdos, y cómo se resuelvan. Ya que se han realizado pocas investigaciones sobre la dinámica entre estadounidenses y mexicanos, mucho menos sobre la resolución de conflictos, esta investigación tiene el potencial de ser muy innovadora y emocionante para todos que estén involucrados.

Confidencialidad:
Toda la información que Ud. provee será manejada de una manera confidencial. Su identidad no estará conectada con su entrevista de ninguna manera, y cuando los resultados de la investigación se reporten, Ud. sera identificado/a con un nombre diferente para proteger su identidad. Información sobre Ud. (apuntes y grabaciones) no será utilizada por nadie, ni entregada a ninguna persona ni organización, más que la Lic. Susana Rinderle, y sólo por el propósito que ya se describió. Información demográfica sera recolectada para poder completar la investigación. Ejemplos de información demográfica incluyen su edad, profesión, lugar de nacimiento, etc. Ud. no está obligado/a de contestar ninguna pregunta que no desea contestar.

Participación:
Su participación en esta investigación es completamente opcional. En cualquier momento, Ud. puede decidir retirarse de la investigación o parar la entrevista. Se le solilcitará a Ud. participar en dos entrevistas: una con su pareja, la cual durará aproximadamente una hora, y otra entrevista a solas otro día, que durará como 30 minutos. La Lic. Rinderle estará dispuesta de contestar cualquier pregunta que Ud. tenga en cualquier momento sobre la investigación y las preguntas de la entrevista. También se le tomará una fotografía, y las entrevistas serán grabadas en audiocassette, con su permiso. Ud. puede rehusar que se le tome la fotografía, y puede parar la grabación en cualquier momento. Las fotografías no serán usadas para ningún propósito, más que la referencia propia de la investigadora, sin su permiso. Todas las grabaciones serán destruidas dentro de un año de la entrevista. No habrá ningun cobro ni compensación monetaria

para su participación en esta investigación. **No hay ningun riesgo conocido a su salud psicológica ni física relacionado con su participación en estas entrevistas.**

Información de contacto:
Si tiene cualquier pregunta o duda sobre esta investigación, o si gusta recibir una copia del reporte final de esta investigación, favor de contactarse a: Susana Rinderle al teléfono +1 (505) 980-3320, o sjrinderle@hotmail.com o: The University of New Mexico, Communication and Journalism, MSCO 32240, Albuquerque NM, 87131, tel. +1 (505) 277-3253. También puede acudir a Dr. Enrique Sánchez Ruíz, Universidad de Guadalajara, tel. 33-38-25-49-91. Si tiene otras dudas o quejas sobre sus derechos como participante en esta investigación, contáctese al Institutional Review Board (Mesa Directiva de Revisión Institucional) at the University of New Mexico, Profesor José Rivera, Scholes Hall, Room 255, Albuquerque NM, 87131, tel. +1 (505) 277-2257.

Entiendo la información en este formulario. Mis preguntas han sido contestadas de una manera satisfactoria, y estoy de acuerdo de participar en esta investigación. Me ha sido entregada una copia de este formulario.

Nombre de participante _____ **Firma** _____ **Fecha** _____
(en letra de molde, por favor)

****

Para la investigadora solamente:

En mi opinión, considero que este participante es voluntariamente y conscientemente proveyendo acuerdo informado y que posee la capacidad legal de proveer acuerdo informado para participar en esta investigación universitaria.

Nombre de investigadora: Susana Rinderle **Firma** _____ **Fecha** _____

Appendix I

Original text of translated responses given in Spanish

1. p. 87: "Pero yo no recuerdo ya alguna última, algún conflicto." (Nicasio)

2. p. 88: "Es muy diferente; no sé si en qué categoria caería porque bueno, puede ser muy diferente un conflicto y una pelea en si, ¿no?" (Adolfo)

3. p. 89: "Un conflicto para mí es … más tener que decidir algo y no llegar a un acuerdo … es un argument que no se resuelve, ¿no? … conflicto es que se tenga que resolver de alguna forma." (Leticia)

4. p. 93: "Él fue y peleó, como pelearía cualquier papá." (Iliana)

5. p. 93: "Yo creo que el ser mixto, en mi caso ha ayudado mucho, porque por mi forma de ser no me identificaba mucho con algunos mexicanos. Mi forma de ser es muy liberal y [Ben] lo acepta. ... No dudo que hayan mexicanos que también lo acepten pero no con los que yo había tratado. Eso era un problema...el querer yo tener tambien mi propia vida, ¿si?" (Leticia)

6. p. 94: "Este, él me dijo ay, aquí es mi teléfono, me puedes hablar. Y yo dijo no no no, como yo pensé que estaba bastante atrevida yo en buscarle. No quisiera estar tan atrevida que le voy a hablar entonces dije no, no te voy a hablar, pero me puedes hablar a mí." (Jennifer)

7. p. 96: "La que tuve muchos descalabros antes de casarme ...Entonces ya no me importó fijarme en el físico. Ya me importaba más en algo que, que me valoraron como mujer – como mamá – que respetaba mi hijo, que lo tomaron en cuenta. Que me ofrecieran algo...y con [Gabriel] encontré todo eso." (Iliana)

8. p. 97: "La mayoria de mis amigas me dijeron que yo era una tonta por casarme con él. Y me dijeron que era un albur y yo dije cualquier matrimonio es un albur aunque seas de la misma raza, religión; lo que sea. " (Leticia)

9. p. 97: "Y con otras parejas así nos vemos muy similares en el, pues en cuestiones diarias." (Jorge)

10. p. 104: "...yo sé que ella tiene razón, pero por, no sé, como que por orgullo no le digo "sí," o sea, "tienes la razón." O porque es algo en lo que personalmente me afecta." (Adolfo)

11. p. 105: "Es una forma también, este, del mexicano de que alguien te dice – estás en desacuerdo con alguien – y dices muchas cosas como que no lo voy a hacer ... pero al final tu ya sabes que lo vas a hacer. Pero primero lo dices todo para hacer sentir mal la persona ... Y eso es de todos los mexicanos, les molesta que otra persona les diga qué tiene que hacer. Recibir ordenes ...Es un, como se dice, una cosa cultural de, yo creo que porque viene de los españoles." (Carlos)

12. p. 106: "Es muy planeadora, muy, todo quiere por escrito, o sea casi por escrito, y por, como que calendarizado, ¿no? O sea todo tiene que ser el día que ella dijo, el día que ... lo pensó o se imaginó hacerlo, ¿verdad? Entonces, y quiere seguir las cosas al pie de la letra y pues bueno eso no se puede, ¿no? – planear lo que vas a hacer mañana – porque exactamente no ha sucedido. Entonces no sabes qué va a pasar." (Adolfo)

13. p. 107: "Y yo me sentía a gusto. Me siento todavía hasta la fecha, a gusto así – o sea, saliéndome tarde. Y él no lo, no lo entiende." (Iliana)

14. p. 107: "…que ella planea todo muy sistemático, y yo cargo desde última hora de que, "ay pero yo tengo que ir a ensayar," o "tengo que ir a..." Esto le molesta, o sea, ella quiere – desde que despierto – quiere tener una agenda de todo el día y yo no; estoy como que va saliendo el día." (Carlos)

15. p. 107: "Puede aplicarse a lo mejor hasta la cultura porque, bueno, ... las personas americanas les gusta todo eso. O sea mucha organización, mucha, este pues, organización, estructuracion y planeacion de sus actividades. Ellos ... parecen relojitos, ¿no?" (Adolfo)

16. p. 107: "...su ... mania de ser tan rígida con los planes." (Nicasio)

17. p. 108: "Como por un mexicano es mas fácil aventarse al rollo que estar planeando ... Hay un dicho como 'si pega bueno, y si no, despegado estaba.' ... Esto es lo principal diferencia cultural que hay, que hay entre ella y yo. O sea, que ella planea todo, muy planeadito, y yo no. Yo soy así, no sé lo qué va a pasar. Ni ella tampoco lo sabe, pero hace un esquema de lo que cree que va a pasar, eso. (Carlos)

18. p. 111: "Nunca pensé que mi país era el mejor del mundo, o que mi cultura era el mejor del mundo. Y ella tiene una idea de que no hay nada mejor que Estados Unidos... Y ... para ella es, el quedarnos aquí sería como que echarte para atrás, ¿no? ... Éso ha sido de lo que, creo que lo único que no concordamos... La primera vez que fue difícil el estar aquí, ya era la única salida. O sea en realidad en vez de, 'sabes que, órale, fue difícil ahorita, pero a lo mejor mañana ya no,' ¿verdad? Entonces ... a lo mejor fue de las cosas que ... casi no hay problemas

pero si me llegaron a, como que molestar. Como que nunca ha luchado por algo y ya ahorita que tiene que, ¿no?" (Adolfo)

19. p. 113: "… los gritos y los golpes no lo resuelven, simplemente lo complican, lo hacen mas profundo ... Los golpes más bien creo que son, o los gritos, para que uno de los dos domina al otro." (Nicasio)

20. p. 114: "And I let the things happen and like I, actuo por mi misma.. Lo pienso pero no se lo digo porque siento como que es muy – no complicado explicarselo – pero es muy, ay. Que para mí, yo sé cómo manejarlo, pero él quiere saber detalladamente lo que yo quiero hacer, y a veces no quiero explicarlo porque se me hace muy, pues yo sé dentro de mí, yo sé que va a funcionar. Entonces la hago así así asá, pero para no explicarle, no traducirle todo. Simplemente lo, dejo ir que pasan las cosas … Siento como que aquí ya sé más o menos manejar las personas – no manejarlas – sé hablando cómo puedo solucionar un problema. Yo que hablo el idioma ... y para él es más difícil éso." (Iliana)

21. p. 117: "Y si hay principios en común, yo creo que son mucho más poderosos o importantes o dominantes que la diferente cultura. Sin partir de la cultura occidental." (Rodrigo)

22. p. 118: "Y sabemos muy bien que el respeto es la mejor manera de convivir y resolver las diferencias. Porque ciertamente tenemos diferencias. No es posible pensar que alguien que nace en Estados Unidos o alguien que nace en México piense igual, no... Pero si existe el respeto, comunicación y aceptación de que cada persona tiene derecho a vivir su vida, pensar como quiera, pues, es mas fácil." (Nicasio)

23. p. 119: "Cuando vamos a comer o vamos a cenar, el tiempo que pasamos sentados en la mesa es mínimo dos horas. Porque estamos platique platique platica, de cuánto tema se nos ocurre... Y yo he visto a otras parejas que llegan a la mesa, piden la carta, piden su alimento, ¡y en media hora ya están pagando y se van!" (Nicasio)

24. p. 122: "Si algo no le gusta de mí, lo dice muy directamente ... Cosa muy rara, para mí, o sea, no soy tan directo. O sea si algo me molesta de ella, yo no lo digo muy directamente, muy, tal vez yo lo hago con acciones... Yo hago acciones, equis acciones, que yo sé que lo van a demostrar que yo, que yo estoy molestado con ella." (Carlos)

25. p. 123: "...yo sentía que era mucho lo que él se la pasaba frente a la televisión y muy poquito lo que yo veía. O sea, nos acostabamos a ver televisión y estaba viendo lo que él quería ver. Y un día de plano dije, ¿por qué? O sea, ¡no! No porque yo quiera ver algo mexicano, pero no quiero complacerlo tanto... O sea me siento asi como que él es muy egoista. Aunque yo no le estoy diciendo, 'yo quiero ver esto,' pero me siento como egoista porque el trae el control en la mano. Y una vez sí hubo un problemita porque le dije, 'Sabes qué, yo me voy al cuarto a ver televisión, y yo voy a ver lo que yo quiera.' Y me encerré con seguro, y me dice, '[Iliana] come here, [Iliana] come here, you can watch the TV here.' Pero le dije, 'No, quiero tener la televisión para mí sóla, por media hora o una hora, pero viendo lo que yo quiero, no solamente lo que tu quieres.' Pero no eso porque no me gusta lo que el vea. Lo disfruto." (Iliana)

26. p. 124: "Creo que [Ann] y yo tratamos de vivir la vida de forma agradable. Es decir, ambos tratamos de disfrutar la vida... Y para disfrutarla, pues hay que quitar los problemitas y hacer una relación mas fluida ... Deberíamos aprender a resolver los desacuerdos antes de que lleguen a pleito, y nunca lleguen a ser un conflicto... Si no te comunicas entonces el desacuerdo no se manifiesta y rápidamente se manifiesta como pleito. Si el pleito no lo resuleves se convierte en conflicto, y cuando hay un conflicto, ¡uf! Ya tienes que llegar a otras cosas que normalmente ya no resuelven. (Nicasio)

27. p. 128: "Conozco parejas que se llevan aparentemente bien, porque uno de las dos partes se somete, y pierde su independencia. Entonces uno de los dos lleva siempre la guía y la otra sigue. Y bueno pues, tal vez no hay problemas, pero tampoco hay una manifestación de cada quien para llegar a un equilibrio. Y otras parejas [siempre] están peleando." (Nicasio)

28. p. 129: "La verdad es que en una pareja mixta hay muchos motivos, muchas causas de diferencia – el idioma, la cultura, la religión, la economía, la política – hay muchas. Pero también eso hace que exista más riqueza y más oportunidades de aprender. "(Nicasio)

29. p. 129: "La gente en general cree que es difícil una relación bicultural. La gente aquí en México, no sé en Estados Unidos... Yo creo que si me hubiera casado en caso con un mexicano, hubiera tenido la misma relación. O sea, no, para mí el hecho de ser de dos culturas diferentes no, no significa ni más ni menos, ¿si?" (Leticia)

30. p. 131: "...pensé que iba a ser más, más este, el como me he sentido yo con él que es americano, como se ha sentido conmigo que soy mexicana ... No ha sido, creo que no ha sido mucha la diferencia." (Iliana)

31. p. 131: "Es como tratar con un, no sé como un, como un desconocido." (Carlos)

32. p. 131: "... sí claro, sería diferente, sería más, no más fácil, sino más ... directo. O sea, porque si fuera una mexicana tu ya sabes lo que, lo que va a responder." (Carlos)

33. p. 134: "Creo que se ha tenido que ver mucho la cultura; mucho este los hábitos. Pero también ha tenido mucho que ver el, la comprensión y la y el respeto más que nada. El respeto de, a sus hábitos culturales y a mis hábitos también." (Carlos)

34. p. 134: "En una relación de dos culturas diferentes, yo creo que lo primero deben de hacer las personas dentro de esta relación sería el el no criticar, o no, este, no pensar que ninguno es mejor que el otro, ni que el otro es, este, menor ni mayor – o sea y dejar las críticas muy afuera. Tomar las opiniones y de allí construir una propia para la pareja ... vamos a ver las dos y construir una a la mitad de las dos, ¿no? Para los dos." (Adolfo)

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