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Communication and "The Mexican Way": Stability and Trust as Core Symbols in Maquiladoras

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Core cultural symbols are clusters of symbolic systems with a central and unifying force which reveal the way people construct meaning and enact identity through communication processes. This study examined the core symbols of "stability" and "trust" in Mexican communication in U.S. American-owned assembly plants in Mexico (maquiladoras) and found that while Mexicans perceive "stability" and "trust" as organizing constructs contributing to satisfying relationships, they evaluate U.S. American communicative behaviors as eroding these core ideals. This study reveals that analysis of core cultural symbols is a powerful framework for understanding the ways both structural conditions and dyadic behaviors influence satisfaction and effectiveness in organizational relationships.

ONE WAY OF UNRAVELING THE INTRICATE WAYS in which people intersubjectively create identity through communication interaction is by identifying and analyzing core cultural symbols (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993). Core cultural symbols are clusters of symbolic systems with a central and unifying force (Schneider, 1976) which contain normative power in revealing both prescriptions and proscriptions for how one should behave in order to be considered a competent member of a cultural community (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993). These symbols can provide insight into acceptable behavior, moral standards, and expectations for conduct within a cultural group. The core symbols that are shared by a group are identifiable through recurrent patterns of communicative behaviors (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993) which create, through mutual enactment, a sense of shared cultural identity.

Researchers have used analysis and interpretation of shared patterns of relating in naturally occurring interaction to increase understanding of cultural identity and communication in numerous types of

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relationships and contexts. These have included the construction of male identity in Teamsterville (Philipsen, 1975), self-identity in *Donahue* discourse (Carbaugh, 1990), communication in U.S. American intimate relationships (Katriel & Philipsen, 1981), communal identity in Israeli griping patterns (Katriel, 1990), and Haida Indian identity in Alaska (Eastman, 1985). Other researchers have examined how core symbols sensitize one to diverse perspectives in interethnic and intercultural communication. For example, Hecht, Collier, and Ribeau (1993) found five core symbols relating to enactment of African American identity (i.e., sharing, uniqueness, positivity, realism, and assertiveness). Hecht, Ribeau, and Sedano (1990) found five themes related to satisfying Mexican American communication (i.e., worldview, acceptance, negative stereotypes, relational solidarity, and expressiveness), while Carbaugh (1993) found contrasting core ideals in Soviet and American expression of soul and self. These studies have illuminated the ways symbolic behaviors reflect cultural identities through communication processes as well as the pitfalls to satisfying intercultural or interethnic interaction.

Core symbols have also been used to explain communication in organizational contexts (see Carbaugh, 1988). Based on the premise that organizations represent cultural systems in which "members of a collectivity make sense of their interlocked activities with one another" (Pacanowsky & Berkey, 1979, p. 11; Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, 1983), analysis of such core symbols have been used to explicate the ways in which communicative behaviors reflect shared beliefs and understandings among organizational group members. Furthermore, since core symbols not only illuminate beliefs but also embody normative force which guides behaviors, understanding shared symbolic systems of organizational members can lead to such pragmatic outcomes as developing "the capacity of human beings to appreciate and manage contexts" (Morgan, 1982). Specifically, analysis of cultural symbols has been used to understand the ways organizational members overcome problematic communication in order to achieve shared organizational goals. For instance, Carbaugh's (1988) study of organizational culture in a public television station identified and explained four core symbols which revealed social cohesion and division in organizational life.

The study of core cultural symbols can be particularly useful in organizational contexts in which communication and/or cultural identity is problematic. One organizational setting in which communication and cultural identity are problematic is in maquiladoras, U.S.-owned assembly plants in Mexico. The maquila industry is representative of the international liaisons prevalent in today's competitive global economy. In 1996 the maquila industry consisted of more than 2,300 plants, employed more than 700,000 workers, and produced more than $21.4 billion dollars in gross annual output (Vargas, 1996). While U.S.

Americans, Canadians, Japanese, and Germans all have established maquiladoras in Mexico, by far the overwhelming majority of these plants are owned by U.S. Americans (Vargas, 1996).[1] Since the first plants were constructed, the growth of the maquiladora industry has been fraught with problems. Although United States Americans[2] and Mexicans working in maquiladoras are interdependent in terms of reaching common organizational goals, organizational structures maintain national cultural inequalities between Mexican and U.S. American maquiladora personnel. For example, in a typical maquiladora, U.S. Americans occupy the highest levels of management, while Mexicans fill mid-level management and assembly-line positions. Abuses of socio-structural power in maquiladoras has led to criticism that U.S. Americans exploit both assembly-line workers and the environment (Fernandez-Kelly, 1983; Martinez, 1994). In addition, others have critiqued the maquila industry for spreading U.S. American cultural, political, and economic hegemony in Mexico (see Barry, 1992; Fernandez-Kelly, 1983), and for the "demexicanization" of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands (Martinez, 1988).

The U.S.-Mexican borderlands in which most maquiladoras are located are unique in that they are characterized by internationality, meaning that people on both sides of the border are bound by extensive and systematic environmental, economic, political, and familial linkages (Alvarez, 1991; Beegle, Goldsmith, & Loomis, 1960; Chavez, 1992). Rosaldo (1989) has urged scholars to study cultural frontiers such as the borderlands because in these areas we are likely to find culture in process, emergent, and socially negotiated in everyday intercultural interactions. He points out that previous scholarship has often focused on cultures as "static" entities and studied cultures as discrete groups, "frozen" by researchers' descriptions in time and space.

As a geographical and cultural borderland, the U.S.-Mexico border is perceived by some as creating cultural marginality; and, indeed, many borderland inhabitants feel like they do not belong to either national culture, but to something "in-between." These inhabitants report that coping with marginality involves the creative enhancement of cultural identity in everyday life. For example, Anzaldúa (1987) explains:

> I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in their own territory). I have been straddling that *tejas-Mexican* border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. (p. i)

Due to the penetrating force of culture, one would expect that in maquiladoras, organizations in which people from different national cultures are interdependent and unequal, the negotiation of meaning and identity would be problematized because "people do not share the same experiential space, and therefore, differ in their interpretations and uses of symbols and norms" (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993, p. 26). In fact, researchers have found that internal and external communica-

tion problems are among the major factors negatively impacting organizational effectiveness in maquiladoras (Thyfault, 1987).

Although previous studies have highlighted problematic issues from both Mexican and U.S. American perspectives (see, e.g., Kras, 1989; Martinez, 1994; Thyfault, 1987) what is missing from many of these studies is an analysis of communicative practices of the people who live in the borderlands and work in maquiladora contexts. As discussed earlier, one powerful research tool for understanding cultural identity in organizational practices is the examination of core symbols in context. This study analyzed the use of core symbols to explore communication in maquiladoras. Specifically, this study explored the following questions: What (if any) core symbols function as the organizing principles which guide the enactment of Mexican cultural identity in maquiladora relationships? What insights does the use of such core symbols provide into Mexican cultural norms for communication in maquiladora contexts?

Method

Overall Design

Following social science scholars who argue that the triangulation of methodologies is a primary tool for enhancing the reliability and validity of research findings (Babbie, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I collected data using multiple approaches including interviewing, nonparticipant observation of interaction, and analysis of organizational publications. Together these data sources provided multifaceted descriptions of people's actual communicative behaviors from two national cultural perspectives—U.S. American and Mexican. Data gathered using these methods was analyzed inductively.

Interviews

Over the course of the fieldwork, formal interviews were conducted with twenty maquiladora employees in Hermosillo, the capital of Sonora, Mexico.[3] The average length of each interview was four hours. I interviewed many of the employees more than once. In addition, I had many informal conversations with these employees as well as with maquiladora owners, managers, and employees who were not formally interviewed. These interviews and informal discussions took place in a variety of contexts including restaurants, managers' offices, and homes.

Eighteen of the individuals participating in formal interviews were administrative and management personnel: general managers, manufacturing managers, manufacturing engineers, production managers, human resource managers, as well as the president of the Maquila Owners' Union, a former president of the Maquila Workers' Union, and a maquiladora shelter operator. I also interviewed two line workers.

These interviewees included three U.S. Americans and 17 Mexicans. Management was emphasized due to the structure and role responsibilities inherent in this industry.

Formal interviews. The formal interview procedures used were based on Spradley's (1979) guidelines for ethnographic interviewing. Ethnographic interviews provide thick or rich descriptions of culture as a way of life. These interviews began by informing the participants of the purpose of the study and assuring them that their participation was voluntary and that their anonymity was guaranteed. Next, I obtained background information about participants' work experience, roles, and responsibilities. Subsequently, I posed a "grand tour" question in which I asked the participants to describe a typical work day. After this introductory sequence, the interviews became more focused; I began asking questions about actual interactions in the maquiladora context. In this part of the interviews, I asked open-ended questions designed to ascertain each participant's recall of both intercultural and cultural interaction situations. Finally, I asked each participant what advice s/he would give others about how these situations should be handled. All of these formal interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

Informal interviews. I conducted informal interviews as conversations on the topics of cultural and intercultural communication in the maquiladoras. These conversations emerged from interactions with participants in the formal interviews and with others who were knowledgeable about maquiladoras. These were unplanned conversations which occurred spontaneously during the time I was living in a U.S.-Mexican bordertown. For example, I met one Mexican maquiladora line-worker at a local Denny's restaurant, and this acquaintance led to a discussion of his work and differences between U.S. American and Mexican cultures. In another situation, I served as a bilingual guide for a U.S. American who was visiting the city to inquire about opening a maquiladora. While traveling around town with this visitor, I spoke to people at the local *Secretaría de Comercio y Fomento Industrial* (Secretariat of Commerce and Industrial Development), where the American visitor and I went to gather information about regulations, office lease space, and banking services. While I was at the Secretariat, I also discussed maquiladoras and cultural communication issues with a number of Mexicans who provide services for the maquila industry. These interviews had no formal structure; they simply occupied portions of naturally occurring conversations. As a result, they were not, as a rule, recorded; however, I completed field notes as soon afterward as it was possible. While it is impossible to count the exact number of informal conversations I had about maquiladoras and U.S. American and Mexican cultural communication issues, I recorded 30 informal interviews in my field notes.

Non-Participant Observations

In addition to conducting interviews, I also toured seven maquiladora plants and recorded my observations in field notes. These assembly plants for the auto, kitchenware, leaded glass, silver plating, and computer technology industries use components from outside of Mexico, coordinate organizational policies and procedures with U.S. American home offices, and assemble products which are primarily exported to United States' consumers.

During my field observation trips to the plants, I compiled descriptive accounts of maquiladora physical contexts, gathered such documents as organizational charts and company brochures, and observed interaction patterns among managers and workers. Recognizing that my own European American identity might influence the data collection and interpretation processes, I clearly indicated in my field notes which data were based on my observations and separated these notes from those based on participant accounts and member checking. Member checking, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) have suggested, is an important way of reducing chances for error in interpreting actors' accounts. This process of asking organizational members questions in order to check on my own observations and interpretations as well as to check on other participants' descriptions of communicative interactions was incorporated into my field notes during the ongoing collection process. I lived in the U.S.-Mexican borderlands for over 18 months in order to have easy access to the maquiladoras, to experience the borderland's cultures, and to develop a sense of connectedness with the Hermosillan community. During this time I developed extensive personal relationships within Hermosillo, which facilitated my acceptance in the community and which helped me to develop the trust which is critical to ethnographers' relationships with their participants. Although I often worried about how my identity as a European American affected Mexican participants' willingness to disclose negative information about interactions with U.S. Americans, both the extensive cooperation I received in gaining access to plants and participants and the positive verbal feedback I received from interviewees indicated that people perceived that my goal—understanding Mexican cultural and intercultural communication in this context—was very important, and they took my research seriously. This was exemplified by one Mexican shelter operator's comment to me: "People criticize the conditions in Mexico without ever seeing for themselves. I respect you because you are here to learn, so that when you criticize, it will be because you have seen for yourself and you understand" (field notes, April, 1994). Another Mexican manufacturing manager also explained, quite passionately, that he took talking with me about the maquiladoras very seriously: "Communication is very important; in fact, it's the most important thing in my job" (field notes, February 1994). The enthusi-

asm of participants for teaching me about Mexican cultural communication also is demonstrated in the richness of their accounts.

Written Documents

Written documents were another data source which I used to complement the interviews and non-participant observations. I analyzed 16 issues of *The Twin Plant News,* a monthly periodical widely circulated along the U.S.-Mexican border which specifically focuses on maquiladora industry issues. The issues examined covered the period between January 1993 and August 1994, the approximate period during which the fieldwork was conducted. Articles selected for analysis were those which covered cultural communication issues; thus, an article was analyzed if it discussed the ways culture affected how organizational members communicated with each other, with members of other organizations, or with the public.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the formal interviews, informal conversations, field notes, organizational documents, and magazine articles I relied upon systematic inductive analysis to identify recurring themes in the data and to interpret the conceptual relationships between these themes (see Bulmer, 1979; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Robinson, 1951; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Specifically, I used Carbaugh's (1986, p. 94)[4] systematic framework for understanding cultural communicative codes. This methodological framework involved the following analytical steps: 1) locating recurring primary symbols (which may occur as words, phrases or propositions), 2) searching for associated terms which cluster close in meaning to the primary symbols, 3) identifying terms used in opposition or in contrast to the primary symbols, and 4) exploring relevant sequential terms or recurring patterns evidenced in discourse sequences by cultural actors.

What emerged from this method were two cultural symbols—*stability* and *trust*—and their related semantic dimensions—treating workers as "mi gente" (my people), in contrast to treating people as "just machines." According to Carbaugh (1988), identifying the prominent symbols and related terms used by a cultural group, in this case Hermosillans, enables one to interpret "the complex, tensional, and polysemic nature of cultural terms" (p. 231) and to identify the norms which guide their communicative behaviors (i.e., the evaluative criteria they used to judge whether behavior was positive or negative).

In this paper I first provide an overview of the relationship of core symbols to cultural values and normative communication behaviors. Next I describe how *stability* functions as a core symbol and discuss the ways that Hermosillans' talk reflected their self-described stability in multiple spheres of relationships. Then I explicate the way *trust* as a

core symbol is co-created through culturally normative behaviors which mutually reinforce stability across multiple interpenetrated and overlapping relationships. I conclude by discussing how these organizing principles can help us to recognize and understand threats to communication competency and cultural identity experienced by Mexicans in their interactions with U.S. Americans.

Core Symbols in Community Interaction

The cultural symbols of *stability* and *trust* were two organizing principles or themes which cultural community members used to construct idealized expectations for ways of behaving. Hermosillan managers' accounts, for example, provided important insights into understanding how these cultural values guide their organizational relationships. In contrast to their descriptions of U.S. American managers—whom they saw as taking advantage of their higher power status and thereby violating culturally normative expectations, Hermosillan managers described themselves as taking responsibility for those who work for them. Furthermore, Hermosillan managers' interactions with line workers reflected cultural norms for working relationships which have deep roots in Mexican culture under traditional patronage systems.

These patronage systems, common in agrarian communities throughout Central and Latin America, were characterized both by inequality between owners (*patróns*) and their workers and by strong bonds of personal interdependency (Alvarez & Collier, 1994; Archer & Fitch, 1994). Workers' dedication to their *patróns* resulted not only in workers' sustenance needs, like housing and food being met, but their emotional and familial support needs being fulfilled as well. As Archer and Fitch (1994) explain,

> *Patrones* were expected to take a personal interest in the welfare of workers and their families, addressing them by first names, caring for them when they were ill, participating or contributing to their celebrations. . . . Often the *patrón* was expected to serve as godfather for the children of loyal workers, . . . to sponsor or provide protection for a godchild. (p. 79)

Thus, traditional patronage relationships embodied many of the characteristics of extended families; indeed, based as they were on the core cultural values of stability and trust, these patronage relationships were like families which protected and supported group members. An understanding of the roles and functions of traditional patronage systems is particularly relevant to understanding modern day management in Hermosillo, given that the area has evolved from an agrarian-based economy. In fact, participants reported that many of the Hermosillan managers in maquiladoras were descendents of families who had owned ranches in this area, while the line workers often came from farm labor families (field notes, March 1994; April 1994).

This study extends previous scholarship by providing empirical data which shows that some of the primary characteristics of the traditional Mexican patronage systems—emotional affiliation, reciprocal loyalty, and personal obligation—also permeate Hermosillan managers' and workers' maquiladora relationships. For example, the emotional affiliation typical of the traditional patronage system is evident in the ways Hermosillan managers described the importance of supporting line-workers' emotional needs (e.g., "show concern"), discussed protecting their identities (e.g. "you can't hurt an employee's feelings"), and expressed affection for their workers (e.g., "I love my Mexicans"). Likewise, the reciprocal loyalty which characterized traditional patronage relationships is manifested in the ways managers emphasized the need to provide dependable work hours and compensation for their employees (e.g., "It is important to build confidence in the employees that they can depend on a certain work schedule and stability in pay"), and in their acknowledgment that in return for these commitments to stability and trust they expected worker loyalty (e.g., "more confidence in the relationship develops and then they owe you"). Managers demonstrated that the personal obligation typical of patronage relationships also remains an important aspect of managers' maquiladora relationships. This was evidenced by their explanations of how they tried to enhance employees' personal and familial well-being. For example, they explained that they regularly would "ask an employee, 'How can I help you?' " They also explained that they tried "to teach the employee how to have a better life," in part by providing education, skills, and social activities such as "prenatal care classes," "soccer teams," and "*carne asadas*" (barbecues). For Hermosillan managers, each of these characteristics of manager-employee relations—emotional affiliation, reciprocal loyalty, and personal obligation—served to create and maintain enduring relationships.

This study's discovery of the way stability and trust are co-created through interactive behaviors in maquiladoras supports and extends the research of other scholars who have identified the development of trust (*confianza*) as essential to positive Mexican (Vélez-Ibañez, 1983) and Latin American (Archer & Fitch, 1994) working relationships. In fact, Alvarez and Collier's (1994) ethnographic research in Mexican trucking industries emphasizes that "*Sin confianza no hay negocio*" (Without trust, there can be no business). Significantly, in many intercultural interactions with U.S. Americans, Hermosillan managers report noticing the lack of communicative behaviors which would support these ideals. Hermosillan managers' proposed remedies for strengthening ties between individuals in maquiladoras as well as in informal and formal networks of affiliated connections demonstrated the importance of the core cultural symbols of *stability* and *trust*.

Stability as an Organizing Principle

Hermosillans made repeated references to the concept of stability. The word *stability* was common in their descriptions of what was appropriate and desirable. In addition, Hermosillans used the word *stability* to refer to the types of intracultural/intercultural relationships which they felt promoted "good communication." The centrality of this construct was highlighted in the semantic associations which participants made. These included "never moving," "staying married," "knowing others for a long time," "balancing the ratio of males to females," and considering "employees as fixed expenses." Behaviors which supported stability were seen as the ideal in relationships between family members, between managers and employees, and among members of the community.

Hermosillans' speech revealed the importance of stability through the semantic dimensions they used to characterize *instability*. Opposing or contrasting terms and word phrases they used to describe instability as harmful to relationships included these: "missing families," "divorce," "employee mobility," "imbalance in male and female ratios," "turnover," "jumping the fence," "jumping the border," "treating people as just heads," "treating people like machines," and instability in the "economic and political" environment.

"Families Give Us Stability"

One way I came to understand the salience of stability in Hermosillan relationships was through feedback I received about my own identity. During my stay I developed numerous professional relationships with professors, administrators, and students at the Tecnológico de Monterey, a local university in Hermosillo. During an office visit with one professor (a U.S. American expatriate who had married a Mexican woman and who worked and lived in Hermosillo), I perceived a reluctance to engage in anything more than brief interaction. Since I was accustomed to Mexicans' generosity in granting me lengthy interviews and other forms of research assistance, I was perplexed. When I questioned him about this, he told me that people in Hermosillo were not familiar with the role of female field researchers, and he was afraid that people would believe that I was there to "sleep with someone," which would potentially harm his own marital relationship. This evaluation confused me, for I did not believe my behavior had warranted this judgment. So, as in other cultural contexts in which I was confused, I asked for advice from other Hermosillans. When I shared this account with a Mexican friend, he explained:

> Families give us stability in Mexican culture. Men want stability in families because the Mexican economy and politics are sometimes not stable. In Mexico the family is the stable foundation. (field notes, March 1994)

As my friend explained, in this context my female identity was perceived as a possible threat to this Mexican family's stability. One of

the reasons why this potential threat was taken seriously by the professor and my friend was because the Mexican family is a vital force in meeting basic survival needs. The problems that Mexicans often face—high unemployment, underemployment, inflation, and peso devaluations—create an economic environmental context in which the future often is characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability (Castañeda, 1995). Families and extended kinship networks help Mexicans adapt to these challenges through assistance, labor exchange, information and other forms of reciprocated support (Alvarez, 1991; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1996). Understanding the ways in which Mexicans' cultural value of stability was related to familial bonds, mutual aid, and reciprocity enabled me to better understand why Hermosillans related some problems in maquiladora relationships to familial instability.

They're "Missing Families"

Hermosillans sometimes spoke about their values by contrasting the stability in their own maquiladora relationships with the relationships between members of other groups, especially among U.S. Americans and Mexican bordertown residents (e.g., in Nogales, Tijuana) which they perceived as unstable. One U.S. American general manager who had lived in Hermosillo, and who had directed a stained glass assembly plant for over five years, contrasted Hermosillan and bordertown maquiladora labor forces in this way:

> The turnover at the border is fifty-percent. Many of the kids are emigrants from the interior regions of Mexico. They miss their families and go home to visit and don't come back. . . . It's more stable here in Hermosillo. We don't have these sorts of problems. (field notes, May 1994)

This account refers to problematic conditions created for maquiladora workers due to the fact that approximately 80% of U.S. American maquila industries are located close to the border in order to facilitate transportation of materials and products to and from the U.S. (Wilson, 1992). This is more efficient and profitable than locating plants in the interior of Mexico where the majority of the unemployed labor force lives. However, it also suggests that these U.S. American maquiladora owners have not considered the personal costs in family stability to emigrant workers who need employment, but who must often leave their families to secure it. In order to fully appreciate the emotional cost of factories' locations for many line-workers, one must understand the affective nurturance that characterizes Mexican extended kinship networks. Thus, this account revealed that the emotional health of line workers is linked to familial support; without familial support and the attendant communication of affection, tenderness, love, and belonging typical of Mexican families (Díaz-Guerrero, 1967), instabilities (i.e., high turnover due to workers returning home to their families) occur.

Whereas bordertowns were perceived by Hermosillans as fostering conditions of instability which are harmful to relationships, Hermosil-

lans repeatedly described their own community as being stable (field notes, March 1994; May 1994). One controller for an automobile assembly plant contrasted U.S. American and Hermosillan family stability in this way:

> Hermosillo has been primarily an agricultural community in which people were born and raised and never moved, compared to Detroit which is highly industrialized and in which the population is mobile. . . . Religion is also very different. We are predominantly Catholic, so people stay married. People in the U.S. think nothing of a divorce and may get one every four years. Here, we take divorce very seriously. (field notes, March 1994)

This controller repeatedly referred to stable relationships in Hermosillo in contrast with mobility and divorce in U.S. relationships as something U.S. Americans need to know in order to comprehend cultural differences in maquiladora relationships. The meaning and importance of Mexican comparisons such as these can only be understood through the examination of the way concepts are linked to the idealized cultural symbol of family stability. Among Mexican residents in Hermosillo, marital stability is undergirded by Catholicism which provides an explicit moral structure governing family relationships. The Hermosillan controller's description of American marriages implies an immorality, which is viewed as threatening to good relationships. Due to the permeability of familial, social, and organizational relationships in traditional Mexican culture, stability or instability within in each type of relationship is described as interpenetrating and supporting stability or instability in other relationships.

Hermosillans' perceptions of the fragility of U.S. marital relationships are mirrored in their perceptions of U.S. working relationships. Employee mobility in U.S. American home offices was viewed by Hermosillans as negatively impacting communication in maquiladoras. As one Hermosillan manufacturing manager explained,

> One [communication] problem is that with—[home office name] U.S.A. rotates their employees a lot—there's a lot of mobility there-people keep changing jobs or leaving or transferring, so you always have to keep getting to know new people to work with. (field notes, April 1994)

While she described the relative mobility of home office employees in the U.S. as negatively impacting communication, this manager contrasted this lack of stability with a description of the factors which lead to "good communication" among Hermosillan personnel. Fundamental to her sense of what enables good communication was *stability* in lifelong interpersonal relationships:

> Our communication is really good here. The informal communication is really the most important thing. A number of people here knew each other in high school; for example, I knew [name] in high school, I also knew the trainer [name] in high school, so we had known each other for a long time and done things together outside the plant. This is really important in contributing to the communication at the plant. (field notes, April 1994)

Thus, the norm "good communication" is described and evaluated in terms of the longevity, the stability of interpersonal linkages that

connect people in their familial, social, and organizational lives. Communication competency is described as developing over the course of long-term relationships through interaction occurring both within and outside the plant. Analysis of the semantic dimensions associated with *stability* show that "never moving," "staying married," and "knowing each other for a long time" explain how Hermosillans believe the kinds of interconnected relationships which support good communication in organizational processes are created and maintained. Hermosillans contrast these stable, good communication relationships with U.S. American experiences of "divorce" and personnel "mobility" which are negatively evaluated as undermining the foundation for positive relationships. Furthermore, the moral dimension of stability in relationships alluded to by one manager in terms of "staying married" is seen by Hermosillans as directly related to bordertown instability and worker exploitation.

The Wives Need to "Cross the Border"

Hermosillans perceive familial instabilities contribute to conditions in which female maquila line workers in bordertowns are sexually exploited. As one Mexican shelter administrator who has worked with U.S. Americans to establish more than thirty-nine maquiladoras explained to me:

> The exploitation goes both ways. The female employees used their sexuality to move up the ladder and get better pay and the managers used females to take care of their sexual needs. . . . The divorce rate is very high at the border because you have managers living in Rio Rico [U.S.] who have wives with children and they're not taking very good care of themselves and the man is spending sixteen hours a day across the line with these beautiful young women who have just reached the prime of their lives and who look very attractive to him. Before you know it, the boss is staying late to be with his female employees and the wife is wondering where her husband is. (field notes, February 1994)

In my research, as well as that of Fernandez-Kelly (1983) and Martinez (1994), sexual exploitation of female line workers by maquila managers is reported to be a common occurrence in bordertowns. Participants in my study suggested that the lack of strong familial relationships among both U.S. Americans and Mexicans in bordertowns influences the conditions under which this exploitation occurs. According to Williams (1990), traditional Mexican family norms support protective behaviors to guard female chastity before marriage. Due to the fact that many maquilas have hired predominantly female line workers (and justified this hiring based on women's ostensibly greater manual dexterity), women as young as 16-years-old have emigrated from the interior of Mexico, without their families, to take advantage of these bordertown maquila job opportunities. The lack of family protection and support for these young women contributes to their vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Likewise, according to Hermosillans, the relatively instability of U.S. American marital relationships also negatively impacts maquiladora work relationships in

bordertowns (field notes, February 1994; March 1994). Thus, Hermosillans see intercultural contact in bordertown maquilas resulting in a culture clash of competing family value systems.

When I asked one Mexican administrator what should be done to remedy this problem, he responded by suggesting ways to restore stability in familial and community relations for both U.S. Americans and Mexicans:

> The maquila managers' wives need to be active in the maquilas. Since the husband is in Mexico all the time, the wives need to cross the border sometimes too and come to the plant and do something there like teach English so that the other women know that the manager has someone. (field notes, February 1994)

This administrator's prescription for resolving the problem involved a two-fold solution: integration of familial and organizational identities based on the core cultural value of stability. He suggested that the physical distance of the U.S. American wives who are geographically isolated across "the line" (the border) in the United States contributes to the problematic relationships between U.S. American managers and Mexican female assembly workers. This separation, he suggested, leads to U.S. American wives' apparent invisibility within Mexican bordertown communities and inside maquiladora operations, which he suggested contributes to a general community and organizational sense that U.S. American managers lack emotional affiliation, personal obligation, and reciprocity in their relationships (those traditional patronage system values). While the geographical distance between the maquilas in Mexico and Americans' homes in the U.S. may be relatively small (a few miles), the international border divides people in bordertowns by physical, legal, and bureaucratic barriers. U.S. Americans whose families live in the United States while they work in Mexico and who never bring their families over the border to meet organizational personnel are viewed by Hermosillans as disassociating themselves from Mexicans.

The remedy articulated by the shelter administrator highlights the importance of norms for connectedness among familial and organizational relationships for Mexican culture. According to this Mexican administrator, U.S. American wives' active participation within maquiladora communities would facilitate female workers' acknowledgment of the U.S. managers' identities as a husbands and heads of families in a way which would alleviate "mutual" sexual exploitation. Thus the managers' wives' actions within the maquila community would influence the way their identities are perceived by female employees. Instead of seeing managers' wives as strangers who are physically distanced from their husbands' roles in maquiladoras, the wives' identities would be linked to their husbands as both wives and as workers with an active role in the maquila organization. It is unclear from this manager's account whether these wives would volunteer to teach or would be hired; however, in either case, his solution—

integrated and overlapping familial and work identities—is common in Mexican culture. While hiring family and friends is a practice that is often viewed with criticism (as nepotism) in the United States, it is a preferred practice in Mexico, due to cultural values reinforcing the importance of connection and affiliation (Kras, 1989). In fact, Vélez-Ibáñez (1996) found that the interpenetration of familial, social, and organizational relationships among Mexicans creates a type of "entanglement" which provides social insurance against "the vagaries of the employer-employee relationship" (p. 146) and protects against possible abuses which may occur in asymmetrical working relationships.

Analysis of the core construct of "stability" as it relates to incidences of sexual exploitation, then, reveals the ways Hermosillans perceive instabilities in U.S. American relationships as both a cause and effect of problems in U.S. American managers' relationships with Mexican female line workers. In the maquiladora context, establishing systems of interpersonal connectedness between familial and organizational lives is viewed as a possible safeguard against sexual exploitation because ideally, in close relationships, group members protect one another.[5] However, to make this possible, U.S. American wives need to cross both the physical and symbolic "border" to become a part of maquiladora community life.

Men, Women, and "The Natural Balance"

Although encouraging U.S. American wives to "cross the border" and become involved in maquiladora operations was described as one solution to sexual exploitation, another solution offered concerned remedying the imbalance in the population ratio of males to females in maquiladora organizations. As mentioned previously, many maquiladoras have hired predominantly female line workers, which has resulted in a much larger population of females than males within the maquiladoras and bordertown communities. The resulting condition has left young, single, female line workers with limited opportunities for dating. As one Mexican manager explained to this me, "they need to hire more males to restore the natural balance of males and females in the maquilas" (field notes, February 1994). This manager explained that as the former President of the Maquiladora Workers' Union he has strongly advocated this position many times:

> One time I offered to pay wages for a whole month for male employees if the plant would just hire males . . . in order to prove to the employers that males could do the assembly work just as well as the females. The plant owner refused. (field notes, February 1994)

This manager's account suggests that the U.S. American managers either did not perceive that sexual relationships between managers and line workers were problematic or that they did not support proposed solutions aimed at restoring gender balance among worker populations. One reason may be cultural: The U.S. managers may not

have seen the gender "imbalance" as linked to sexual exploitation in the plants.

Analysis of the way Hermosillans perceive "instabilities" as negatively impacting relationships helps explain their perception that "imbalances" in personal lives interpenetrate and mutually influence other types of "instabilities." Both instability in families and imbalances in the sex of community populations were described by Hermosillans as contributing to and reinforcing exploitive conditions in manager-employee relations. Hermosillan managers' solutions were to level imbalances and to reinforce stability across personal and organizational lives.

Employees are "Just Heads"

Hermosillan managers also described maquila workers' lives as linked to other types of stabilities and instabilities within a community. Hermosillans perceived that instability in bordertown communities creates environmental conditions in which workers may be objectified, and they saw this objectification as reciprocally influencing instability in terms of both worker turnover and immigration to the United States.

In addition to sexual objectification, another way in which assembly line workers are objectified became apparent to me in a trip I took into the bordertown of Nogales. During my visit I met a U.S. American owner of a local maquila who asked me what I was doing in Nogales. I replied that I was studying maquiladora communication, whereupon he told me that he had developed a successful system for handling communication within his plant. When I inquired how he had managed this, he responded: "I don't allow any communication—from the time the workers come to the plant in the morning until the time they finish, they are not allowed to speak." I asked if people were unhappy with this organizational policy and he replied, "It doesn't matter if they're unhappy, it doesn't matter if they quit, I can get other workers very easily" (field notes, September 1993). This kind of treatment of workers, a mechanistic approach which emphasizes organizational profit at the expense of workers' personal needs, has led some Hermosillans to accuse U.S. Americans of treating Mexican line workers as "just heads" [i.e., as expendable and replaceable parts] (field notes, February 1994; April 1994).

In an interview with the Mexican President of the Maquiladora Owner's Union, he advised me that "Americans make a big mistake when they think they are hiring 'machines' instead of people." He went on to explain that Mexicans perceive that they are being treated as "machines" when U.S. American managers emphasize a task orientation over a personal orientation in everyday work interaction (May 1994). According to many Hermosillan managers, the treatment of workers as "just heads" or "machines" in some bordertown maquilas

results in high workforce turnover. Employees working in such conditions were described by managers as continually "leaving for better job opportunities" (field notes, April 1994), "waiting to jump the fence," or "waiting to jump the border" [crossing to the U.S. illegally] (field notes, April 1994; May 1994).

In contrast to this mechanistic managerial approach to maquiladora operations, one Hermosillan production manager explained how and why managers should communicate a personal orientation in their interaction with line workers:

> If a person is an assembly line operator, they may not think that they have a great future. They may not be very motivated in their jobs because they think they will be doing this same thing all their lives. What you need to do is to teach the employee how to have a better life. Ask them to stay after work, with no pay, to teach [them] other skills. Train them for a new position after work or encourage the employee to go to school, improve their education. This is what helps motivate employees. (field notes, February 1994)

According to this account, a personal orientation involves communicating with employees in a way which recognizes holistic needs which go beyond what their plant may offer. In order to comprehend what this manager meant when he asserted that line-workers need "a better life," one must understand the maquila line-workers' everyday working conditions. In addition to the previously mentioned possibility of sexual exploitation, line-work involves the mastery of rapid and highly repetitive activities which are "timed" according to standards set by U.S. American engineers (field notes, production manager, April 1994). For example, Lowell (1991) has reported that at the Foster Grant Plant a worker typically handles 7,200 sunglasses each day. Repeating the same operation every five seconds results in a high percentage of musculoskeletal disorders. Additionally, a line-worker in a kitchenware plant mentioned to me that boredom with these repetitive processes leads them to engage in creative recreational activities when the line-supervisor is not looking (e.g., they would throw things at each other) (field notes, February 1994). Another line-worker from an auto assembly plant explained to me that he worked there because he needed the money, but he did not care about his work because all of the raw materials came from the U.S. and the finished product was shipped back to the U.S., which meant the products were neither generated in nor consumed in Mexico (field notes, August 1993).

Thus, what the aforementioned production manager was referring to when he said that line-operators need "a better life" was workers' needs to escape working conditions fraught with a variety of hazards including exploitation, physical danger, and boredom. Managers also explained that line-operators may not have a "great future" unless they are helped because most have completed only six years of education and are monolingual Spanish speakers (field notes, organizational development coordinator, June 1994). Due to the social structure of the maquiladoras, U.S. American owners require Mexicans to have college

degrees and to demonstrate bilingual Spanish and English competency in order to advance beyond line-supervisor positions (field notes, manufacturing manager, April 1994; maquiladora organizational chart, April 1994).

While not all Hermosillan managers recommended training line-operators for jobs outside the plant, most mentioned both educational and social programs they offered to line-operators to improve the quality of their personal lives. For example, one plant had a company soccer team, sewing classes, and a movie theater (field notes, September 1993), and the manager organized regular "carne asadas" (barbecues) for the employees and their families (field notes, February 1994; April 1994). Another plant manager offered educational programs related to women's health issues (field notes, April 1994). Therefore, Hermosillan managers' behaviors reflect their perceived responsibility for helping line-workers to have better lives through activities which include both their employees and their families.

The importance of an emotional connection between managers and their employees (a traditional patronage system characteristic) also appeared in the way managers talked about their relationships with other managers and their employees. This was exemplified in one Mexican administrator's recommendation: "Give me a manager who loves people, not a technical expert. The most important thing is caring about your employees. If you care, the rest will come easy" (field notes, February 1994). His own speech clearly revealed the emotional connection he felt for his workers. He often referred to the workers at his plant fondly, as "mi gente" (my people), and his speech was peppered with phrases like "I love my Mexicans."

This analysis of the semantic dimensions of the core construct of "stability" within the context of manager/employee relationships revealed the negative valence Hermosillans attached to U.S. American managerial behaviors which objectify Mexican workers as "just heads" or "just machines." This objectification is perceived by managers as influencing instability within the plants and in bordertown communities (instability which is seen, for example, in the fact that people are always leaving for better opportunities). In contrast, Hermosillan managers' prescriptions for promoting positive relationships with employees (e.g., "you have to emphasize a personal orientation," "give me a manager who loves people") demonstrate the incorporation of the core construct of *stability* and its connection to closely affiliated relationships. According to Hermosillan managers, managerial competency requires positive emotional expression communicated in ways that validate line-workers' identities and their multiple needs and role relationships outside of organizational walls.

"Trust" as an Organizing Principle

I was born in Distrito Federal. Everyone in my family was better educated than I was. I dropped out of school in the sixth grade because I wanted to be a politician. I thought a way to do that would be to go into journalism. I applied for a job at a place where my cousin worked and was hired under the condition that I never tell anyone what they did at the paper. My boss also told me that when he gave an order that I should follow it without question. The day after being hired, the boss told me that he wanted me to drive him to the Senate building. We got in the car and I was at the wheel. I tried to go down the street, but it's a stick-shift and the car kept stalling. The boss said, "What are you doing? What's the matter?" And I replied, "I never drove before." The boss said, "Why didn't you tell me?" I said, "Because you told me to just do as I was told and never question, so I did." After that, the boss and I got along great because I had followed his orders. (field notes, February 1994)

Most U.S. Americans probably would evaluate this account by a Mexican manager as problematic. They would feel the driver should have been direct in telling his boss he could not drive, and U.S. American bosses would no doubt be upset with an employee who withheld such information. However, from a Mexican perspective, both the employee's and the boss's behaviors were culturally appropriate in that they served to develop "confianza."

An analysis of this account reveals a number of the main features of the core Mexican cultural construct of "trust." Each of these features embodies normative expectations for enactment of identity in close relationships. First, mutual obligation was demonstrated when the boss hired a family member, and in return, this new employee communicated obedience and loyalty to the boss and the organization. Second, face-saving was demonstrated when, initially, the driver did not tell the boss that he did not know how to drive. Third, although the account reveals that obedience to authority was expected of subordinates, it also reveals that there were normative expectations that managers take responsibility for the interests of their employees. This was demonstrated when the boss asked the driver for feedback about the problem. Understanding how this account fits within a system of interrelated behaviors which Hermosillans perceive establish trust in a relationship is best understood by a careful analysis of the ways these behaviors are manifested in maquiladora contexts.

Hermosillans described the communication of "trust" as a conduit for developing "stability" across multiple types of connected and interpenetrated relationships: in working relationships between Mexicans and U.S. American home office personnel, among managers, and between managers and employees. Through analysis of my field observations, the core symbol of *trust* emerged as a central construct of evocative force around which many idealized cultural behaviors radiate. Analysis of the ways Hermosillans refer to *trust* and its semantic associations with confidence and respect reveals that trust is co-created through culturally normative behaviors: Hermosillans create "trust" through "keeping the image," talking about problems, not having

misunderstandings, making suggestions, asking for help, and experiencing a "melding of the minds."

As in situations in which Hermosillans perceived U.S. Americans' communication and behavior as threatening "stability," Hermosillans also perceived U.S. American communication as violating cultural norms for creating "trust." The vitality of the construct *trust* for cultural norms of behavior was reinforced through an examination of instances in which Hermosillans talked about the contrasting semantic dimension (i.e., being unsure, being afraid, worrying, and communicating with someone new). In addition, behaviors that Hermosillans described as diminishing trust included these: "saying you don't understand," "showing stress," "telling someone what to do," "telling people they are wrong," "hurting people's feelings," and "confronting." According to Hermosillans, such communicative behaviors unravel the threads of trust which hold together satisfying, long-term, and *stable* relationships.

You Treat Them Well, and then "They Owe You"

Hermosillans described communication in international interactions as problematic due to the turnover among U.S. home office personnel; they saw such turnover as inhibiting the development of long term relationships. This "instability," in turn, was seen as inhibiting the development of trust, because it is difficult to establish trust with "people who are new" (field notes, manufacturing manager, May 1994). According to one Hermosillan production manager, international communication with U.S. home offices could be improved if "all the communication were centralized through one person—so instead of talking to five people, everything goes through one person and then they can learn to establish trust and confidence because there are no misunderstandings" (field notes, April 1994).

The notion that trust emerges from long-term relationships was repeated in numerous maquiladora industry periodicals (Derderian, 1993; Webber, 1993). One Hermosillan general manager asserted that, at the ideal level, "knowing someone" can enable a "melding of the minds" with "complete trust and truth" between managers (field notes, February 1994). While Hermosillans described "knowing someone" as critical in all types of relationships, they saw this as most difficult in international contexts where communication was "decentralized" and organizational interaction must be coordinated with many different personnel. Therefore, this Hermosillan manager recommended centralizing communication in order to facilitate workers establishment of a personal connection with one person, which would then provide the basis for developing trust.

This personal orientation, which Hermosillans viewed as important to Mexican-U.S. home office communication, also was described by

Hermosillans as critical to organizational success in dealing with clients in the U.S. However, Hermosillans perceived that U.S. Americans' communication dealing with customer complaints differed from their own communicative behaviors. This was exemplified in one Hermosillan manufacturing manager's account:

> Americans don't ask the customer what they want. When there's a problem with defective parts, they won't give information to the client and ask what's wrong with the product because they think the client will sue them. They worry too much about being sued. This is not the Mexican way. We're not worried about lawsuits. We trust each other. . . . It's important to talk to the client about the problem and work it out. Americans want to involve lawyers in everything. (field notes, February 1994)

From this manufacturing manager's perspective, the way U.S. Americans communicate with clients prioritizes concerns for minimizing expenses which may be incurred through lawsuits. Hermosillans juxtaposed this type of communicative behavior with the kind of talk about problems which involves mutual exchange of information and builds trust between Mexican managers and their clients.

While Hermosillans emphasized the importance of personal relationships and concern for others' problems as promoting trust, additional participants' accounts highlighted other aspects of culturally normative behaviors associated with this core value of *trust*. As one Hermosillan manufacturing manager explained, in international communication "trust" is facilitated through the creative use of various communication instrumentalities:

> Sometimes there are language problems with [home office name]. I teach my Mexican employees that when they don't understand, or they feel nervous, or are unsure whether they understand, they should not say so. They should never say, "I don't understand." This makes people lose confidence in you. When you think they don't understand, or when you don't, you say, "Can I send you a fax?" or, "Could you send me a fax, I want to verify some details?" Communicating over the phone is really hard because you can't use any signs. (field notes, April 1994)

As this account makes clear, one's own and others' positive identities must be maintained in order to promote confidence in working relationships. This manager's description invoked a cultural proscription against conveying nervousness or lack of understanding, either of which he suggested would harm one's self identity and detract from positive working relationships. Additional interviews also revealed a complementary prohibition against communicating in ways that threaten the other's positive face. Thus, when a misunderstanding occurs, cultural norms prohibit the use of direct verbal communication that would require the other to convey negative self-face. Instead, Hermosillans often relied for clarification on non-interpersonal channels (e.g., a fax with a diagram, chart, or written message) which did not directly threaten the communicator's own or the other's face (field notes, production engineer, April 1994; manufacturing manager, April 1994).

Culturally appropriate enactment of behaviors which support self, other, and relational identities builds trust and reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings. However, since the U.S. American workforce is relatively mobile, there are often home office personnel who are "new" to the role of coordinating organizational goals with Mexicans. This increases the likelihood that misunderstandings will occur. In discussing Hermosillan managers' misunderstandings with new U.S. home office personnel, I asked one Hermosillan production manager how she communicated when she thought someone was wrong. She replied,

> I just make suggestions about things, but I don't tell people they are wrong. I just give them information to make the decisions and then they are grateful and the relationship benefits from this. When you just make suggestions and don't tell people what to do and let them learn and make decisions for themselves, then more confidence in the relationship develops and then they owe you. You didn't confront them; you treated them well, with respect, and now they owe you. (field notes, April 1994)

According to this production manager, indirectness was appropriate in situations in which another's face (or self-presentation) was vulnerable. In addition, the account revealed an explicit cultural norm for mutual obligation: There was an inherent expectation that protection of another's face through use of indirectness in a possible conflict situation would result in reciprocity. As one manager put it, "You treated them well, with respect, and now they owe you." Thus, Hermosillans' talk revealed the ways that trust is co-created through interactions in which each party protects the other's face.

In summary, analysis of Hermosillans' descriptions of international communication processes reveals a number of barriers to the establishment of trust with home office personnel. Considering that Hermosillans build stable relationships through extended networks of informal contact outside organizational settings, international relationships are problematic when they do not provide opportunities for this breadth of interaction. In addition, it is unlikely that Hermosillans will see international relationships which do not include expressions of concern for and mutual protection of others as relationships that can be trusted.

Identity and Trust

Analysis of Hermosillan managers' accounts of communication interaction revealed that Hermosillans saw a number of communicative behaviors as essential to the co-creation of trust. One of these, as described earlier, was the Hermosillan cultural prescription for indirectness. However, Hermosillan managers typically described U.S. Americans as using direct communication, which violated Hermosillan cultural norms (field notes, manufacturing manager, February 1994; shelter manager, February 1994). Such cultural differences in communication styles were highlighted in a number of maquila industry periodicals which I examined. Periodical advice repeatedly invoked

proscriptions against U.S. American directness in working with Mexicans, as this *Twin Plant News* article illustrates:

> Don't ask "yes" or "no" questions. . . . Don't ask leading questions (questions which reveal which answer you'd like to hear). . . . Direct communication will result in intimidation, increased problems, more turnover and unreturned phone calls. (Webber, 1993, p. 20)

Each of these types of direct communication was seen as inhibiting trust in relationships. In order for U.S. American managers to establish a climate supportive of trust, they were advised to "ask open-ended questions" and to display complementary non-verbal behaviors such as "smiling," showing "relaxation," and "friendliness." These non-verbal behaviors were stipulated as communicating receptiveness to hearing "at least a watered down version of the most recent crisis." These periodicals also advised U.S. American managers to expect that Mexicans would "discretely insert a 'trial balloon' to see if you can handle the unpleasant news" (Webber, 1993, p. 20). Analysis of these maquiladora trade periodicals revealed repeated advice that U.S. Americans should manage their own self-presentation in ways that conveyed both verbal and nonverbal receptiveness to negative information in order to be effective in intercultural interactions.

Although these periodical accounts contained explicit recommendations for ways U.S. Americans could increase their competency in building trust, one Hermosillan plant manager's account of actual intercultural interaction revealed other barriers to the co-creation of trust. He explained:

> When the . . . corporation had meetings I would be the only Mexican in attendance, the only Mexican. Americans don't know Mexicans so they don't trust Mexicans. They are afraid to ask Mexicans for help, to learn Mexican ways. They don't want to learn anything new. (field notes, February 1994)

As in the previous account in which U.S. American anxiety about lawsuits was contrasted with trust, perceived fear of asking for help was also interpreted as poisoning the climate of trust which Hermosillans saw as necessary for constructing positive relationships. On the other hand, Hermosillans perceived U.S. American communicative behavior which demonstrated a willingness to learn Mexican ways (e.g., by asking Mexican managers for information, help, and advice) as reinforcing trust and complementing other communicative behaviors which emphasize interconnected and interdependent identities. As this Hermosillan manager's comment indicated, however, such behaviors were not viewed by Hermosillans as typical communication behaviors for many U.S. maquiladora managers.

U.S. Americans "Don't Trust Employees"

> Employees understand their own work better than anyone else. When you want to make changes, in production levels, or products, you need to explain the situation to the employee and ask, "How can I help you?" Don't tell the employee what to do. Americans do this because they don't trust the employees, but you need to ask employees what they

think and you need to suggest ways of doing things, not just order them to do something. (field notes, manufacturing manager, February 1994)

According to this account, a manager who asks employees "How can I help you?" would be viewed by employees as creating trust in their relationship. Asking employees for feedback and making suggestions may be interpreted as serving dual functions: creating trust through communicative behaviors reinforcing connectedness and also validating the employees' role identity within the organization. Concomitantly, the kinds of communicative behaviors which validate the importance of employees' identities within the work organization also support the ideal of stability. Employees whose role identities within the plant are not honored in this way are likely to perceive that the managers are treating them as "just machines."

That employee identity needs to be confirmed and validated within the group context was elaborated on by this Hermosillan production manager, who explained what he does when an employee is not meeting corporate productivity standards:

When I have to discipline an employee, I start off by talking about the person's place in the corporation and what they are there for . . . what their role is in the plant. Then I talk to them about what they need to do. It is important not to hurt the employee, because once you do—[he shrugged, as if to say, "It's the end"]. (field notes, February 1994)

As in previous accounts that involved potential threats to face, protecting the other's identity was emphasized by this manager's descriptions of his communicative behaviors. In discussing the employee's role identity within the plant, he was highlighting the importance of personhood as existing in connection to others. Individual roles and responsibilities were not discussed as separate from one another, but rather in relationship to one another, and the focus of disciplinary action highlighted the individual's accountability to the group and his/her importance to achieving group goals.

In summary, the potency of the core symbol of *trust* and the continuum of interrelated behaviors it refers to is best understood through an interpretation of the semantic dimensions which constitute the system of meaning Hermosillans associated with these behaviors. By analyzing the communication behaviors which build trust with those which diminish or destroy it, I was able to inductively derive the distinctive features associated with each. These, in turn, enabled me to identify dimensions which differentiate the characteristics of interactions which adhere to norms for trust from characteristics of interactions which violate these norms. The three dimensions which emerged through this inductive process were close/distant, supportive/evaluative, and interdependent/independent.

The first dimension identified, *close/distant,* concerned the degrees to which people felt known by and emotionally close to one another. Hermosillans perceived the concept of *trust* as being related to relation-

ships which vary in degrees of closeness (e.g., friends, family) and distance (e.g., strangers, acquaintances). In distant relationships in which people were unfamiliar with one another, they saw development of trust as dependent on communication interactions which adhered to cultural norms for support and validation of self, other, and relational identities. These included communicative behaviors which expressed interest in others' concerns and mutual protection of public images. Mexican cultural prescriptions indicated that communication which was purposively subtle, indirect, and/or ambiguous was appropriate in distant relationships. Hermosillans perceived distant relationships as potentially face-threatening; for example, they reported feeling uncertainty and stress when interacting with strangers (especially in the home office).

In close relationships, while these face-saving behaviors were also normative, they were seen as appropriate in other types of face-threatening situations (e.g., "when you don't understand" or "when someone is wrong"). However, in long term relationships people have the opportunity to gain more personal knowledge about others' uniqueness. This, then, enables the establishment of the type of relational context necessary for understanding subtle, indirect, and/or ambiguous communication and avoiding misunderstandings. Furthermore, although individuals were perceived as unique (hence the experience of uncertainty in meeting someone new), identities were conceived as interconnected. This means that identities were negotiated in interaction processes: How one acted in relationship to others emerged as one interpenetrated the others' unique worlds.

The second dimension identified, *supportive/evaluative,* concerned the degrees to which people demonstrated commitment to creating and sustaining positive evaluations of one's own and others' identities. It is clear that Hermosillans did not perceive that positive affirmation of others' identities meant that one agreed with all of those persons' actions; rather, it meant that one had respect for them. This was especially evident in situations in which people gave negative feedback to others. *Supportive* communication included giving people information, discussing problems, and expressing positive regard for others' roles in the organization. This was contrasted with *evaluative* communication which included directly disagreeing and expressing negative regard for others' opinions or actions.

The third dimension identified, *interdependent/independent,* also related to the degrees to which people construed and expressed their identities as either connected to or separated from others. Hermosillans perceived that people were dependent on one another for multiple and diverse types of need fulfillment in maquiladora organizations, including validation of role identities, coordination of organizational activities, and achievement of personal and organizational goals. Communication which emphasized these *interdependencies* was seen

as serving to develop trust in relationships. Hermosillans perceived that normative behaviors which demonstrated interdependency went beyond mere "openness" to really hearing others' ideas. Furthermore, acknowledging interdependencies in talk meant taking the responsibility for others. This was clearly demonstrated in prescriptions which indicated that one needed to ask for others' opinions, to ask others how one could help them, and to allow people to learn and grow. In contrast, Hermosillans saw *independent* communication as diminishing trust. Since interdependency was highly valued, communication which did not acknowledge this interdependence was evaluated negatively. This was clearly demonstrated in the account about the business meetings in which one Mexican manager complained about not being asked for his help. It was also evident in the norm Hermosillans expressed for disciplining employees: Individual employees' performances were not critiqued in terms of their independent roles, but in terms of their obligations to the group.

Interpretations of the semantic dimensions represented by the terms Hermosillans associated with trust referred to *close, supportive,* and *interdependent* communication between people. This was contrasted with *distant, evaluative,* and *independent* communication which was perceived as impeding, diminishing, and/or destroying the process through which trust was intersubjectively created and maintained.

Contributions

This analysis increases our understanding of the dynamic interaction of *trust* and *stability* as core symbols which influence both communication competency and interactive co-construction of identity in maquiladoras. Hermosillan maquiladora managers described communicative behaviors associated with these ideals as the basis for stable, long-term, interpenetrated and multi-layered relationships which connect individuals, families, organizations, and communities. These Hermosillans' accounts reflected the ways that the stability of their [traditional, Mexican] extended networks of familial and social relationships within their own community is seen as protecting against the infiltration of undesirable aspects of U.S. American values in organizational interaction. On the other hand, their descriptions of bordertown maquilas also revealed the ways that intercultural contact with U.S. Americans is seen as resulting in threats to stable structures of interpenetrated relationships which support Mexican cultural identity. One instability is seen as feeding into another until disruptions manifest themselves in individuals, families, organizations, and entire communities. Through this analysis of the ways Hermosillan cultural actors construct and interpret symbolic interaction in bordertowns, we can develop a clearer understanding of what it means to live in this cultural, political, and economic borderland between two worlds.

This analysis of Mexican cultural communication revealed a number of barriers to mutually satisfying intercultural relationships in maquiladoras. The analysis and interpretation of some of the semantic dimensions radiating from the symbolic construct of "stability" provide explicit cultural prescriptions for developing managerial competency in maquiladora relationships. Specifically, maquiladora managers should: 1) work to create and maintain long-lasting and interconnected familial, organizational, and community relationships; 2) locate plants in communities which have sufficient population to meet laborforce demands; 3) hire both male and female line-workers in order to accommodate the needs of both sexes; 4) develop organizational policies and programs to improve employees' personal, familial, and organizational lives; and 5) emphasize a personal orientation with employees, including behaviors which communicate positive affect and caring.

Analysis and interpretation of Hermosillans' semantic associations with the core symbolic construct of *trust* also provide several explicit prescriptions for developing managerial competency in maquiladora contexts. Specifically, maquiladora managers should: 1) centralize international communication in the U.S. home office; 2) ask clients how managers can help resolve problems; 3) use indirect forms of communication to protect self, other, and relational identities in face-threatening situations; 4) manage self-presentations in ways that convey receptivity to negative information; 5) ask employees for suggestions and ask how they, as managers, can help them; 6) discipline employees by discussing the importance of their role responsibilities to achieving group goals; and 7) avoid displays of negative emotions in self-presentation. While trust is built through dyadic face-management strategies aimed at protecting mutual identities, significantly, these strategies are complemented by dyadic communicative behaviors which construct stability in relationships through emphasizing positive emotional expressions of interconnectedness.

U.S. American understanding of the core cultural constructs of *stability* and *trust* should be mutually beneficial for both U.S. Americans and Mexicans because communication issues have been identified as major challenges to maquiladora plant managers (Thyfault, 1987). Analysis of the dimensions associated with these core ideals embodies organizational implications for improving interactions between Mexican managers and their U.S. American managerial colleagues, as well as between managers and the corporate owners of maquiladoras. Hermosillans describe the enactment of these norms as contributing to enhanced satisfaction, improved motivation, and decreased turnover. Thus, adaptations in U.S. American communication practices which incorporate the norms relating to *stability* and *trust* may very well enhance organizational communication, productivity, and bottom-line profits.

In addition to these pragmatic insights, this study also makes significant contributions to the communication discipline. It adds to a considerable body of research which has helped us to better understand how people culturally enact identity in naturally occurring interactions (e.g., Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Hecht, Ribeau, & Sedano, 1990; Katriel, 1990). Thus, this study provides a foundation for more comparative studies on the diverse ways cultural identities are created, negotiated and maintained. Also, this study affirms the heuristic value of using Carbaugh's (1986) methodological framework for understanding critical aspects of Mexican identity within a system of interrelated symbols and meanings. In articulating dimensions of *trust—close/distant, supportive/evaluative,* and *interdependent/independent,* this study adds to our understanding of how this core symbol is manifested in everyday, ongoing communication in organizations. Finally, this study illuminates how tensions and conflicts emerge in organizations in which people from differing national cultures are interdependent on each other for achieving both personal and organizational goals but do not share the same experiential space or norms for enacting communication behaviors.

Future Directions

This study does not tell us the extent to which these core symbols may be relevant to maquiladora line-workers or Mexicans in other kinds of contexts. Indeed, various researchers have pointed out the importance of recognizing class, ethnic, and regional differences among Mexicans (e.g., Alvarez & Collier, 1994; Diaz-Guerrero & Szalay, 1991), and each of these differences is relevant in considering the limitations of this study. The lower-power status of line-workers is likely to influence the way they experience and evaluate organizational relationships. Hermosillan managers sometimes described their behaviors as characteristic of "Mexicans"; however, it was apparent that they perceived themselves as both similar to and different from those who live outside of Hermosillo. Still, both the characteristics of "trust" as well as patronage patterns of managerial relationships have been found among other Northern Mexicans (Alvarez & Collier, 1994) as well as among Latin Americans (Archer & Fitch, 1994). This suggests that Hermosillan cultural prescriptions for managerial communication may be applicable in other Mexican, Central, or Latin American organizational contexts. Future research then, should explore similarities and differences in core symbols among and within these different groups in maquiladoras, as well as in other types of Mexican organizations and contexts.

Notes

[1]For additional information on foreign investors in maquiladoras in Mexico see Barry (1992).

[2]Selecting appropriate labels is problematic. In this context, I have attempted to keep the labels as close to the participants' own descriptors as possible. Hermosillans from Mexico often refer to themselves as "Mexicans," but they also perceive their cultural community's way of life as differing somewhat from that of those who live in other areas of Mexico like Distrito Federal, Monterey, Chiapas, and bordertowns. Thus, I have used both "Hermosillans" and "Mexicans" to describe this reality. In addition, Hermosillans refer to U.S. Americans as simply "Americans." However, Mexicans are "Americans" too. To eliminate confusion, I have used the term "U.S. American" since it is closest to participants' own label, yet avoids the offensive presumption that U.S. Americans are the only "Americans" in the Western Hemisphere. Although "U.S. Americans" are identified by one label, in maquiladora interaction, this term refers to predominantly European American males. Neither label should be interpreted as this researcher's attempt to "domesticate heteroglossia"; rather, these labels are the participants' descriptors of their own cultural realities.

[3]Interviews with managers were conducted in English and those with line-workers were conducted in Spanish. While Mexican managers are required to be bilingually competent and to use English throughout their working days, some of the nuances of culture may have been lost in the way they articulated their cultural realities in English. For further discussion of some of the difficulties in cross-cultural translatability of experience see Briggs (1988) and Marin and Marin (1991).

[4]For further explanation and use of this framework as a tool for analysis see Carbaugh (1988).

[5]Although the manager I cite argued that sexual exploitation is "mutual" between line- workers and managers, other researchers (e.g., Fernandez-Kelly 1983) have found that managers' sexual advances with workers are mostly uninvited and unwanted. It is unclear how effective wives' participation in maquiladoras might be in alleviating sexual harassment. More research is needed on the functions of these overlapping and interpenetrating familial and organizational roles, specifically as they pertain to sexual harassment issues.

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