1-1-1996

Girlfriend or esposa? Cultural scenarios in translation

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GIRLFRIEND OR ESPOSA?: CULTURAL
SCENARIOS IN TRANSLATION

by

Megan S. Fuller

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Anthropology

Department of Anthropology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 1996
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May 1996
ABSTRACT

In the United States only married couples are called by the terms *husband* and *wife*. In Mexico, both married and unmarried cohabiting couples are referred to as *esposo* and *esposa*, terms usually translated as 'husband' and 'wife'. By using schema theory, American and Mexican cultural scenarios of marriage are developed and compared. The characteristics most important to terminological usage are determined. For Americans, the terms *husband* and *wife* indicate partners with a permanent commitment to each other. Mexicans, on the other hand, use the terms *esposo* and *esposa* as indices of adult status, which can be achieved through cohabitation.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks goes to Gary B. Palmer, who worked on this thesis almost as much as I. Aside from editorial assistance, he provided encouragement and propelled me into the professional world. Naomi Quinn, deserves acknowledgement, because her comments on this paper allowed me to see my own study in a more global perspective. Thanks also goes to Lynda Blair, for her editorial comments.

My mother, Gretchen R. Fuller, deserves recognition for believing in me and not letting me give up. I thank all my consultants for participating, without them this thesis would not have been possible. Lastly, I would like to thank my friends, Margie, Dori, and Jason, and my wonderful boyfriend Oscar who listen to all my whining and complaining and still like me.
CHAPTER 1

CROSSING THE BORDER

Introduction

Between Mexico and the United States cultural understandings of marriage vary greatly. What drew my attention to the dissimilarities of marital institutions was the tendency of Mexicans to use the terms *esposo* and *esposa*, words commonly translated as *husband* and *wife*, to describe American couples who were living together but not married. The use of the same terms to refer to all couples who live together was very surprising to me, as an American. Americans\(^1\) only refer to married partners as *husband* and *wife*, using the terms *boyfriend* and *girlfriend* to refer to cohabiting partners. This thesis explores these differences in terminological application using a cognitive approach. The basic premise of this approach is that terms index social schemas or scenarios. Where usages differ, it is because speakers interpret events in terms of different schemas.

\(^1\)There are many arguments against using the word American to describe people of the United States of America. Some of my Mexican consultants claim the term American denotes any person from the continents of North or South America. Other people I have talked to, from the United States, argue that there is too much ethnic diversity here to have one term blanket all people from the United States. I am using the term American as a referent to those who grew up and went to school in the United States, regardless of ethnicity. By the same token, I am using the term Mexican as an index to people who grew up and went to school in Mexico.

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The differences in cultural marriage practices in the United States and Mexico will be discussed and a general method for comparison will be offered (Quinn 1995a: 6). I will also attempt to determine why there is a difference in usage of terms by identifying the respective cultural scenarios of American and Mexican marriage and cohabitation and then comparing the most salient points of each. If terms such as *esposa* refer to scenarios, then, in theory, identifying differences in salient elements of scenarios should explain differences in usage of terms.

**Methodology**

Participant observation, personal consultations and review of ethnographic literature are the research methods that provide basis for this thesis. I used the American Anthropological Association's "Statement on Ethics" as a guideline for my interaction with consultants (see Appendix 1). All names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect the privacy of consultants. Consultants were all people with whom I had relationships outside of this research. Each couple has been together for a minimum of two years.

At least one member of the 7 American couples that participated is a personal friend in either a married or cohabiting relationship. As the table in Appendix 2 shows, educational levels vary from having a high school diploma
to a doctorate. Occupations differ greatly and income levels cover a wide range, from $20,000 to $100,000 annually. American consultants are from many different areas of the United States, including; Albuquerque, NM, Chicago, IL, Washington D.C., and Las Vegas, NV. All have middle-class backgrounds, except for Betty’s boyfriend Mike, who grew up in the projects. Additional ethnographic information on Americans came from Naomi Quinn (1985). She selected interviewees "to maximize diversity with regard to such obvious differences as their places of geographic origin, religious affiliations and ethnic and racial identities, their occupations and educational background, their neighborhoods and social networks, and the ages of their marriages" (Quinn 1995b: 3). Patterns that appear in both Quinn’s research and my own data are therefore likely to be representative American cultural scenarios.

Mexican consultants are immigrants to the United States, whom I know as neighbors, and other people I met while attending language school in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico. All consultants grew up in middle-class Mexican homes. Observations and consultations occurred with two Mexican couples, as well as with other Mexican individuals, both male and female. Their educational levels range from having high school diplomas to graduate study. Geographically, consultations are distributed widely. My consultants come from the states of Mexico, Jalisco and Guanajuato. Other ethnographic resources extend this variety. Oscar Lewis’ (1959) data was
collected mainly in Mexico City, while Holly Mathews (1992) did her research in the state of Oaxaca and Carlos Velez (1978) studied in the state of Mexico. Lewis and Velez both looked at families in the upper, middle and lower classes of Mexican society. Most of Mathews' consultants were members of the lower class. Considering the previously documented ethnographic information, the demographic representation is fairly broad. Therefore, patterns occurring within the ethnographic literature and in my own field data should be representative of Mexican cultural scenarios.

Consultations\(^2\) were generally, leisurely, friendly and loosely structured conversations. The consultants were asked to talk about their relationships and only occasionally questioned beyond what they volunteered. Spouses were never present during consultations nor were all spouses interviewed. Interviews with female American consultants occurred more often and for longer periods of time than male American consultants. Most information concerning American male consultants has been gathered through observation and brief conversation. Mexican men and women were equally willing to hold detailed conversations with me about marriage and cohabitation. Interviews in Spanish were taped and later transcribed by a native Spanish speaker. Transcripts were only translated if quoted in this text.

\(^2\)On February 7, 1996 the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Human Subjects Institutional Review Board granted me permission to proceed with this project.
CHAPTER TWO

SCHEMA THEORY

The Basis of Schemas

There are typical event types that one can observe in the world, and there are institutions and cultural values that make human endeavors interpretable: for a very large part of the vocabulary of our languages, the only form a definition can take is that of pointing to these things and actions and institutions and indicating the words used for naming and describing parts and aspects of them. . . . But I also do not think that everything that a native speaker knows about the meaning and use of a word can be encapsulated in a dictionary entry (Fillmore 1975: 132-3).

Marriage is a typical event in both the United States and Mexico and words such as husband and wife and esposo and esposa are characteristically utilized.

As Fillmore pointed out, many words cannot be defined in simple denotative formulas. Instead, they need to be related to schemas within the speaker’s world view. This is particularly true of terms embedded in complex social institutions, such as marriage. The terms husband and wife conventionally designate marital status. The terms esposo and esposa also designate marital status, but may additionally designate analogous roles found in cohabiting relationships. One of the goals of this paper is to ascertain what Americans and Mexicans really mean when they use the preceding italicized terms in discourse.

Fillmore (1975: 78) stated that, when studying discourse, four questions
need to be addressed: "(I) What did he say? (II) What was he talking about? (III) Why did he bother to say it? and (IV) Why did he say it in the way that he said it?." He explained question (II) as asking "not simply what was the topic of the discourse, of the portion of the discourse in question, but rather what can we say about the 'scene' or 'history' or 'situation' or 'world' or 'image' or whatever the speaker intended the hearer to create at this point in the discourse" (Fillmore 1975: 79). Fillmore (1975) noted that in the midst of discourse both the speaker and the listener are conjuring up scenes in their heads. I am going to refer to these "scenes" as "scenarios." Scenarios are special kinds of schemas involving human interaction (Palmer 1996).

Conceivably, the schemas attached to the discourse are culturally bound. Fillmore (1975: 80) acknowledged "... there are sometimes differences from language to language in the ways in which linguistic material maps onto detailed images or experiences. ..." Experiences are influenced by the culture in which one lives, just as the label one applies to the experience is determined by the language one speaks. Terms, such as wife or esposa, that are indices the complex cultural institution of marriage, are going to have different culturally constructed ideas mapped on to them.

**Ethnography and Schema Theory**

Cognitive approach to ethnography essentially asks "what do people
think?" and "what do they know about their culture?" (Palmer 1996). Schemas are found in the connectionist school of cognitive theory. They are basically cultural understandings . . . that have come to be shared to a greater or lesser extent without being human universals" (Strauss and Quinn 1994: 285).

Because schemata are cultural, they are learned. "An important property of a schema is that it is an abstract organization of experience" (D'Andrade 1995: 150). Learning can take place through instruction but also through experience. "Usually it takes repeated exposure to a pattern of relations to build up the strongly interconnected, generally applicable associations that we identify as schemas" (Strauss and Quinn 1994: 286). One advantage to experiential versus instructional learning is that constructed schemas are loosely structured. Because they are based on many different experiences, schemas are flexible enough to accommodate new situations (Strauss and Quinn 1994: 285-6).

According to Strauss and Quinn (1994: 285), "the essence of schema theory is that our thoughts and actions are not directly determined by features of the external world but are mediated" by schemas.

Schemata are not fixed structures. Schemas are flexible configurations, mirroring the regularities of experience, providing automatically generalizing from the past, but also continually in modification, continually adapting to reflect the current state of affairs. Schemas are not fixed, immutable data structures. Schemas are flexible, interpretive states that reflect the mixture of past experience and present circumstances (Norman 1986: 536).

Schemata allow us to predict and react to situations similar to those we have experienced before without having to reevaluate the experiences over again.
every time something occurs. Throughout our lives we learn cultural exemplars through experience both first- and second-hand (Quinn 1995b: 14-5). These exemplars are our schemas. Schemas, however, are not prototypes. Prototypes have specific expectations, whereas, schemas only provide a framework which is yet to be filled (D'Andrade 1995: 124). According to Strauss and Quinn (1994: 288-9), schemas have four tendencies:

First, cultural understandings can be relatively durable in individuals. Second, they can be relatively stable historically, being reproduced from generation to generation. Third, they can be relatively thematic, in the sense that certain understandings may be applied repeatedly in a wide variety of contexts. Finally, they can be more or less widely shared; in fact, we do not call an understanding "cultural" unless it is shared, to some extent, in a social group.

Schema tendencies are exemplified by marriage. Cultural understandings of marriage are durable and stable historically because they are handed down from generation to generation. Children observe their parents and receive instruction from them regarding marital roles, goals and expectations. Marriage is thematic. Marital imagery can be applied to many situations in which there are two people; roommates, best friends, or co-workers. Marriage schemas are also culturally rooted. They are widely shared and governed by cultural themes that also influence cultural institutions. D'Andrade (1995: 132) warned however, "The institution . . . with its social roles and their behavioral norms, is not the same as the ideas or schemas that people use to represent, understand and evaluate the behavior. . . . " In other words, just because people are acting
out their roles differently does not mean they are thinking about their roles differently and vice versa. So when studying marriage one must be careful to separate the visible aspects of the institution from the goals and expectations.

Marital ideas and expectations evoke thoughts and feelings, which carry over, as Quinn pointed out, to similar situations. Strauss (1992: 3) believed "cultural models...can have motivational force because these models not only label and describe the world but also set forth goals." Motivational forces of the goals formed by the schema will lead to action. When one is interpreting a situation similar to marriage, such as cohabitation, one will have to determine if the circumstances of cohabitation can fit into the framework of the marriage schema. One must either accept or reject the schema before deciding to call the members of a partnership boyfriend/girlfriend or esposo/esposa.
CHAPTER THREE

AMERICAN MARRIAGE AND COHABITATION

Research on American marriage is common in nearly every field of the social sciences. Studies on American cohabitation, however, are few and far between. If cohabitation is mentioned within the existing research it is usually assumed to be an "informal marriage" (Schoen and Weinick 1993: 409) comprising the same attributes as a formal marriage. But if cohabitation is simply an 'informal marriage' why do Americans call cohabiting couples, boyfriend and girlfriend, rather than husband and wife?

The most obvious difference between marriage and cohabitation is that one is legally recognized and the other is not. Patterns of behavior within cohabitation are closely related to those found in marriage. Certainly, cohabitation is more similar to marriage than to dating. However, because behavior appears to be similar does not mean that the ideas behind the behavior are the same. Though American marriage and cohabitation resemble each other, I suggest that cohabitation has a distinctive schema. This distinctive schema explains the use of different terms for American cohabiting partners.
American Cultural Scenarios of Marriage

Quinn (1992: 7) describes most Americans as thinking of marriage as "the profound attachment to an exclusive other, the security of being with that person, and the trust that that person will not abandon you and will fulfill all your needs." When I asked an American married woman why she married her husband. She replied immediately, "Because I love him!" Another woman answered "Because he was my best friend and I knew he always would be." I asked an American man why he married his wife after they lived together for five years. He told me it was because they were ready to have children. None of these answers were uncommon. All these couples consider themselves to be typically American. Most plan to have children. They all view finances and property as 'ours' rather than 'his' or 'hers' even though many times one spouse was contributing significantly more income to the household. They claim to consider each other in all decision making and planning because whatever they do they do 'together'.

It is the norm for American married couples to regard themselves as bonded into one. Couples who behave otherwise are considered somewhat peculiar. One consultant told me a story about a married couple he knew who kept all their finances separate. They each had their own bank accounts, were responsible for their own bills, and split living expenses evenly. My
Another consultant's comment was "It was as if they weren't even married." Another consultant, Penny, told me she knew a woman who married her husband just because she wanted to have children.

[I know a woman] who just got married and had a baby, her mother already told me that if she didn't want to have kids she never would have gotten married. And I thought to myself, well, then why even bother getting married, women in today's society can have children without being married. Why even go through the hassle of marriage, but, of course, she married someone who was very wealthy... but marriage isn't a means to an end [italics added].

This woman is considered by Penny, and probably many other Americans, to be abhorrent. Rather than marrying someone she loves and having children with them as a sign of that love, she is, in effect, using him for his genes and money. Her view of marriage violates the conventional schema.

Through studying metaphors in discourse and examining ideas about love and commitment in American marriage, Naomi Quinn, has developed an understanding of the American scenario of marriage. She used consultant interviews to construct "the cultural understandings of marriage that must be assumed to underlie discourse about marriage in order to make such discourse comprehensible" (Quinn 1987: 174). Analytically, she looked for types of metaphors of marriage used by her consultants in discourse (Quinn 1987: 174). She stated, "these metaphors themselves cannot be basic to this shared understanding. ... the pattern of metaphor use is a reflection of an underlying schema that people have for thinking about marriage, and that guides their selection of metaphors for it" (Quinn 1995b: 7). Quinn does not regard
metaphor as the basis of thinking about institutions such as marriage, but rather that metaphorical language is generated by schemas, which are more abstract representations.

The metaphors used by her consultants when talking about marriage could be broken down into eight categories:

(1) metaphors of lastingness, such as, "It was stuck together pretty good" or "It's that feeling of confidence about each other that's going to keep us going"; (2) metaphors of sharedness, such as, "I felt like a marriage was just a partnership" or "We're together in this"; (3) metaphors of mutual benefit, such as, "That was really something that we got out of marriage" or "Our marriage is a very good thing for both of us"; (4) metaphors of compatibility, such as, "The best thing about Bill is that he fits me so well" or "Both of our weaknesses were such that the other person could fill in"; (5) metaphors of difficulty, such as, "That was one of the hard barriers to get over" or "The first year we were married was really a trial"; (6) metaphors of effort, such as, "She works harder at our marriage than I do" or "We had to fight our way back almost to the beginning"; (7) metaphors of success or failure, such as, "We knew that it was working" or, conversely, "The marriage was doomed"; and (8) metaphors of risk, such as "There're so many odds against marriage" or "The marriage was in trouble" (Quinn 1995b: 4-5).

The eight classes of metaphor Quinn has put forth provide a good schematic understanding of American marriage. Her model describes its essential ideas and expectations.

Both, Quinn's consultants and my own, often used the term "commitment" in their discussions of marriage. Quinn (1985: 296) stated that "commitment is central to what marriage is all about." What exactly do people mean by the term "commitment" when they use it in reference to marriage?

One of Quinn's (1985: 297) consultants stated, "we were making a commitment together, that we were going to stay together, that we were going to try and
make a go of our relationship permanently." So the commitment in marriage is not just *lasting* but permanent. Another consultant stated that marriage "is a commitment to grow old together, have children and, you know, intermix, and so forth" (Quinn 1985: 297). The marital commitment expects a fusion between two people, they are to live together as one and childbearing and rearing is a symbol of that fusion. A third consultant pointed out that in marriage there is a commitment to "communicate . . . to work things out and to share" (Quinn 1985: 297). Quinn (1985: 312) concluded, "the notion of 'commitment' frames the kinds of goals that are appropriate to American marriage--goals of staying together, having a family and raising children, working out a relationship with one another, and making one another happy." These are the ideas, expectations and goals that Americans have about marriage: in American culture, the people that participate in this scenario are called *husband* and *wife*.

**American Cultural Scenarios of Cohabitation**

Cohabitation as a common occurrence in the United States is relatively recent. Census data show that the practice of men and women living together out of wedlock did not become prominent until the 1970's (Sweet and Bumpass 1987: 336). Nowadays, cohabiting is frequent and often encouraged. In fact, my consultants say they would not marry someone they had not lived with first. Cohabitors have some distinct expectations about the sharing of household
duties, financial burdens, love, responsibility and property ownership. These expectations constitute what I am calling the American scenario of cohabitation. This set of expectations differ in important ways from those of marriage. They are sufficiently distinct to require different terminology to designate the partners in the relationship.

All of my consulting couples claim that their household duties are shared with more or less equity, although tasks were commonly allocated to the person with the most skill. For example, my consultant Dorothy's boyfriend, Frank, is an excellent cook (he even makes his own pasta sauces), so he usually makes dinner. In Jason and Gloria's house, Jason is responsible for making dinner, unless they are having something with cheese, in which case Gloria makes it. Another consultant, Suzanne, remarked that she always does the laundry because her boyfriend will not sort loads and the last time he did it he turned her favorite white sweater pink. But because of this, Suzanne's boyfriend Romeo is always on garbage duty. Betty and Mike take turns doing the dishes and vacuuming, but she does all the cooking and has the unfortunate task of cleaning the toilet bowl. Anthony and Missy split the cooking and cleaning duties but Anthony has the responsibility for feeding their pet snake. In sum, while consultants report that they work for approximately equal periods of time on tasks of similar difficulty and desirability or undesirability, their work

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3I let my consultants pick their own pseudonyms.
patterns are greatly influenced by personal preferences.

Each couple also attempts to share the fiscal burden fairly. Every member of every cohabiting couple who I spoke with was employed. Each partner was responsible for paying half the rent, half the utilities, and their own part of the phone bill. However, it was stressed by every couple that it was unnecessary to split all expenses equally. Though the household bills were usually split evenly, recreational spending was more often "picked up" by the person who made more money (in all cases here, the female). For instance, every summer when Betty and Vinnie, who have since separated, went to the beach for vacation, Betty would pay for everything. When Dorothy and Frank go out to dinner, she always picks up the tab. Gloria and Jason take such pains to keep nonrecreational funding equal that she pays him to fix her car. When I challenged the practice by saying that free car maintenance was one of the reasons I had a boyfriend, she claimed that her car is her own responsibility and that Jason could have been doing other things with his time, so he deserved compensation.

Gloria and Jason provide another interesting example of fiscal sharing: They recently bought a house together. Before this purchase, the only thing they owned in common was a cat. They are working very hard to maintain equal participation in the purchase. Each had to contribute the same amount of money for the down payment and each is responsible for half of the loan. They
keep track of all the hours spent working on the house. Gloria explained that they "work very hard to keep everything equal" so that neither will ever feel that he or she contributed more than the other.

Obviously, if fiduciary contributions are monitored for general symmetry by these cohabiting couples, finances are being kept separate. Each person is also responsible for their own credit card bills, car payments, insurance etc. However, if one person falls short, the other will give or lend them money. All of my consultants asserted that they would be willing to support their partners through periods of unemployment, but none of them expressed a desire to become the permanent sole provider.

Among the cohabiting couples that I studied, property is usually "his" or "hers" rather than "ours." Consistently, all possessions brought into the household remain individual property. It is a rare occasion when something is bought in common. When Betty and her boyfriend, Vinnie, lived together, she made several purchases which were meant to be common. After they separated, Betty was left everything except what the boyfriend originally brought into the household. When Amy moved into her boyfriend’s house, she did not feel comfortable about using his things or rearranging the house to make room for her things without asking him, even though he said he did not mind. Though individually purchased and owned, most property is shared freely and without condition. A noticeable exception is cars, which are individually owned without
exception. Use by the partner was regulated.

Cohabitation is more than just sharing financial obligations and property. The couples are also in love. Betty emphasizes the fact that she lives with her new boyfriend, Mike, because she loves him and wants to be with him all the time. Betty and Mike, Suzanne and Romeo, and Dorothy and Frank are all cohabiting in preparation for marriage. These couples share their feelings and support and motivate each other. Betty and Mike like to lie in bed together on the weekends and talk about their relationship. She assures me that it's not all just mushy talk; they also discuss their future together and how things are going at work. They try to come up with solutions to their occasional problems. Suzanne claims she always feels better at the end of a hard day as soon as she gets home to her boyfriend. She says he knows exactly when she needs a hug.

Cohabiting couples like to spend time together. Gloria and Jason like to read and have coffee together in the mornings. They also try to make time to bike ride and to attend concerts. Dorothy and Frank like to bake cookies together. Anthony and Missy like to go camping. Betty and Mike spend free time in bed. Suzanne and Romeo try to go to the movies every Saturday afternoon.

Cohabiting couples also have a sense of responsibility to one another and make decisions together. For instance, Dorothy and Frank were living in separate cities. They decided that Frank should move and live with Dorothy
until he finishes his dissertation because Dorothy has a good job. After Frank graduates, Dorothy will move with Frank to wherever he gets a job. Betty was also living in a different city than her boyfriend. Though it took about a year for her to find a good job there, she persisted until she found one, because they wanted to be live together, and they both liked his location better.

All the couples believe they have a future together and are willing to work to stay together. One consultant, Dorothy, said that she and her boyfriend are committed to a future together, so they do not play "dating people games." Like Dorothy, all the consultants referred to themselves as not being single. Gloria stated that she lives with the person she loves and does not date others. She claims that they are known as a couple: "Gloria and Jason, it’s like one word." Anthony told me he does not even look at other girls. Betty says she no longer even tries to pick up other guys.

Most of my cohabiting consultants said that they plan to have children someday, but are not ready right now. All the couples except one stated that they when they were ready to have children they would get married. Interestingly, Gloria said that she does not plan to have children, nor does she see herself ever getting married.

In conclusion, an American schema of cohabitation includes sharing of common financial obligations, yet a separation of personal finances and property. It involves a commitment to sharing a future and a willingness to
work towards that. It also involves love and emotional reciprocity.

Consultants unanimously state that they do not expect to have children before marriage. Lastly, they claim that their status is somewhere between married and single even though they are referred to as boyfriend and girlfriend in American culture.

**Girlfriend or Wife?**

Quinn’s schemas of marriage can be used to describe cohabitation as well. Each cohabiting couple has been together for at least two years. They were planning on a future together and therefore considered their relationships to be long term, just as her married consultants did. Thus, they fit the schema of *lastingness*. The married couples, studied by Quinn (1985) were "stuck together", this same sentiment was expressed by Gloria when she said that she and her boyfriend went together "like one word." The second schema, *sharedness*, also works for cohabitation. In both marriage and cohabitation, the couples are "partners" who depend on each other emotionally and otherwise. The third schema, *mutual benefit*, is seen in cohabitation when Betty and Mike work together to solve individual problems. The forth schema, *compatibility*, can be applied to my consultants in the example of Suzanne coming home from work to Romeo who knows that she needs a hug. The fifth marital schema *difficulty*, is also evident in cohabitation. For example, Gloria and Jason try to
remain as equal as possible. To do so, Gloria and Jason, put in a lot of effort, the sixth schema. As Gloria said, they "work very hard." The seventh schema, *success or failure*, is evident in cohabitation, in that Betty and her first cohabiting boyfriend, Vinnie, have separated. Betty feels that their relationship failed because Vinnie did not put as much effort into the relationship as she did. Generally, though, cohabiting couples work to resolve discord and remain together. Finally, there is risk.

In any relationship there is a risk of getting your feelings hurt or your heart broken. However, when Americans talk about risk in cohabitation, they describe it as much lower than that of marriage. When asked why, the response is often something to the effect of "it's easier to get out of" or "you can leave anytime." Baber and Allen (1992: 25) recognized the lower risks in cohabitation when they noted, "Cohabitation allows freedom and flexibility for both partners, and termination costs are low relative to legal marriage." In fact, many of my consultants stated that they were cohabiting to reduce the risk of marriage.

Aside from the amount of risk, the American schemas of marriage and cohabitation appear to be equivalent. In fact, Gloria claims she sees little difference between marriage and cohabitation. She feels no need for the legal acceptance of her relationship which would come with marriage. One of Quinn’s (1985: 302) consultants concurred, "I really don’t believe in the
institution of marriage. I believe if you have a commitment with the person that the piece of paper, the legal thing, is not necessary." To these women, legality is not a salient feature in a relationship. What does seem to have importance is the idea of commitment.

Commitment, shows up as significant in both marriage and cohabitation, but as the following quotes point out, the commitment of marriage and the commitment of cohabitation often are not thought of as being equal. Several of Quinn’s consultants made comments about cohabitation and commitment:

Marriage is-- these people who keep kidding themselves that living-- what's the difference whether you're living together or you wrote something on a piece of paper? The difference is commitment... (1985: 314).

That [cohabitation] was part of the process of deciding that that would happen. But I think in terms of a long-term commitment, it-- if we had said to each other "Well we really are going to stay together for a long time, but we won't get married," that would have seemed silly to me. You know, I mean I was able to think in terms of our relationship, "Well, we'll settle down and we'll have children, we'll..." you know there was some future kind of a thing... (1985: 306).

You know, you choose someone to live with who, in the same way as a marriage partner, is simulating to you, who shares interests with you. It's not like you're married to them in the same sense. You're not-- you don't have that kind of commitment because you just-- they can move out anytime or you can move out (1985: 298).

Many of my own consultants remarked that the commitment of marriage is greater than that of cohabitation. Penny and her husband Joey lived together before they got married, Penny remarked:

When people say, why aren't you just married, you're living together anyway? I guess, they're right, I mean other than going down to the justice of the peace, you get married, and you go home and you're the same people you were the day before. There's nothing different in your life than a certificate that says that in
the courts of law you are legally husband and wife, that's it. But for me at least, and I can't talk for all people, I could probably talk for my husband, it's a level of commitment. For us, for me personally, I always could leave, there was always a way out. In fact, I used to solve my problems that way. If we can't come to a solution or we can't solve this problem then I don't need to be here anymore. Marriage took that option away.

Penny feels that now that she is married she can no longer leave her partner.

My consultant, Betty contends that cohabitation is easier to get out of, not just legally, but emotionally too, because the partners are more independant than married couples. Suzanne remarked that she and Romeo maintain individual property "just in case" they ever break up so it will be easier to move apart.

Anthony referred to marriage as "shackling" because the partners are completely tied together, but cohabiters have more independence. As Dorothy told me, the difference between a married couple and a cohabiting couple is the _degree of commitment_. Anthony considers cohabitation to be semi-permanent.

Remember, in the marriage schema, the relationship is not just _lasting_, which is a relative term, but permanent.

What is missing from the cohabitation schema that obstructs the idea of permanency? Common property and children stand out as the most likely elements. No cohabiting couples combined property and finances. All stated that they would not have children in a state of unwed cohabitation. Penny feels, "if you're not serious enough for marriage then you're not serious enough to be parents." On the other hand, married couples regard property and finances as being joint and many mention having children or a family as reasons they
decided to marry. Quinn (1995a: 7) asserted that "[U]married cohabitation simply does not embrace the long-term commitment to raise a child together."

Schoen and Weinick (1993: 409) made similar observations:

Indeed, cohabiters resemble single persons more than married persons with respect to fertility expectations, nonfamilial activities, and home ownership. Cohabiters are more likely than spouses to keep their financial affairs separate... Cohabitation is thus seen as distinct from marriage because it involves less commitment and greater individual autonomy.

If Quinn’s marital schemas were the only attributes one could use to compare and contrast American marriage and cohabitation, I would agree that cohabitation is indeed an "informal marriage." In light of the fact that most Americans think of commitment, which directly affects the goals and expectations, as being different in marriage and cohabitation I must agree with Schoen and Weinick who studied partner choice to determine if cohabitation is an "informal marriage". While their conclusions about partner choice do not fit my data, I concur with their conclusion that "cohabitation is a distinct relationship [from marriage]" (Schoen and Weinick 1993: 408).

The terms husband and wife have been shown to represent more than just a legal and social recognition of a relationship. They signal a commitment to permanency, with common property and progeny, actual or expected. Though the schemas for marriage and cohabitation are very similar, the members of

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"They conclude partner choices in cohabitation "give more emphasis to short-term and achieved characteristics (such as education) and less emphasis to long-term and ascribed characteristics (such as age, religion, and race)" (Schoen and Weinick 1993: 408)."
these American cohabiting couples generally lack common property and expectations of progeny. This impedes the notion of permanency. Therefore, if these couples are representative of American society, the members of a cohabiting couple must be referred to as something other than husband and wife.
CHAPTER FOUR

MEXICAN MARRIAGE AND COHABITATION

In contrast to the contemporary appearance of cohabitation in the United States, the concept of living together without being married is a very old one in Mexico. The idea of union libre 'free union' has been common for hundreds of years, particularly among the poor. Because they often lacked the money to pay the church, couples would just live together in free union rather than actually marry. Like marriage and cohabitation in the United States, the obvious difference between marriage and free union is the legal recognition of the relationship or lack thereof. I believe these scenarios have strong similarities because persons in either relationship may be called esposo or esposa.

However, scenarios of marriage and cohabitation are changing. Currently young, middle class, urban, educated couples are engaging in what they call cohabitan juntos (cohabiting together) while other demographic groups still live in free union. I suspect that the scenario conjured up by the term union libre is not exactly the same as the scenario for cohabitan juntos. Because it is engaged in by the urban middle class and because it sounds like more like "living
together" or "cohabitation", terms used in the United States, it may resemble the American scenario of cohabitation more closely than *union libre*. Since the basis of marriage, free union, and *cohabitan juntos* scenarios stem from the traditional, it is the traditional scenarios with which I am the most concerned. I will, however, try to point out where the more contemporary ideas of marriage and cohabitation are breaking from the traditional scenarios.

**Mexican Cultural Scenarios of Marriage**

Mexican law acknowledges two kinds of marriage: marriage with joint property or marriage with separate property. After the wedding ceremony, which may be either religious or civil, the couple must check a box on their license, marking either *juntos* or *separado*, together or separate. If the couple chooses *juntos*, everything they have becomes common property. If they later divorce everything must be split. If the couple chooses *separado*, each partner maintains sole ownership of his or her property. Hence, if all property has been purchased by the husband and the couple becomes estranged, the wife gets only what the husband allows. He does, however, remain responsible for provision of the basic necessities for her and the children, such as housing and feeding them.

One of my consultants, Carlos, describes the man in the traditional
marriage as the "king" of the household. The husband should be *macho*, while the ideal wife is humble and timid. The relationship resembles that of master and servant. The man expects food on the table at a certain time and all his clothes washed in a timely manner. If these expectations are not met, he will be angry. The husband also decides how much money to give the wife to run the household and expects her to work within that budget. He may have more than one household to support, because real *macho* men spend a lot of time in the streets looking for other women. If the man does not act *macho*, he can be called *mandilon* 'apron user/wearer'. According to Carlos, a *mandilon* has a good chance of being beaten up. In his family, men never go into the kitchen.

Most published descriptions of Mexican families concentrate on the roles of father and mother rather than husband and wife. Like Carlos, they also depict male dominance and female abnegation within the relationship. Alan Riding (1989: 242), a journalist, wrote,

> At risk of a caricature, a typical Mexican family can still be stereotyped. The father is the undisputed figure of authority who has little respect for-- or communication with-- his wife. He expects to be served royally at home, but he spends much of his time and money drinking with friends or visiting his mistress. He pays minimal attention to his children, although he attaches great importance to having a male firstborn who carries his name. The mother, rejected as a wife and lover by her husband, tries to alleviate all her frustrations through her children, above all pampering her sons in search of allies against the father and of substitutes for his affection. When her children marry and leave home, she struggles to maintain her authority, since her only possible role is as a mother.

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5 *My consultants describe a *macho* man as a man not afraid of anything, not even the dead. "He drinks and probably beats his wife and doesn't give a damn what other people think." Lewis (1959: 17) describes the *macho* husband as being clearly dominant and authoritarian.*
Riding rejects the possibility of a relationship between husband and wife and suggests that the only male-female relationship possible for a married woman is between her and her son(s). After her children leave home, she loses even the small amount of control that she had in the household.

Díaz-Guerrero (1975: 1) stated, "The Mexican family is founded upon two fundamental propositions: (a) the unquestioned and absolute supremacy of the father and (b) the necessary and absolute self-sacrifice of the mother." More specifically,

soon after the termination of the honeymoon, the husband passes from slave to master and the woman enters the hardest test of her life. The idealism of the male rapidly drops away towards the mother. To make matters worse, the wife cannot be considered as a sexual object in a broad sense. Mexican husbands repeatedly indicate that sex must be practiced in one way with the wife and in another way with the lover. The most common statement refers to the fear that the wife might become too interested in sex if he introduced her to the subtleties of the pleasure. . . . The Mexican wife enters much before motherhood in the causeway of abnegation—the denial of all her needs, and the absolute pursuit of the satisfaction of everyone else (Díaz-Guerrero 1975: 9).

Upon marriage the husband gains a slave and the wife forfeits all aspects of herself in order to dedicate her life to serving others. She loses all control over her own life, even her sexuality.

In Oscar Lewis' (1959: 12) ethnography, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*, one of the couples, Pedro and Esperanza Martínez, are described as having a stable marriage "along traditional lines in which Pedro comes close to the ideal village pattern of the dominating authoritarian male and his wife to the ideal of the submissive woman." Pedro
Martínez told his wife "that he was a man and had the right to do what he pleased, that she being a woman and a very stupid one, would have to bear anything he did or said to her . . ." (Lewis 1959: 38). Esperanza was, however, ready and able to behave in the manner that Pedro expected because of the advice given to her by her mother before the wedding.

Now that you are going to marry you must have a different character. Here you have one character but there you must have the character of your husband. If he scolds you, do not answer. If he beats you, bear it because if not your husband is going to say "What kind of upbringing did we give?" (Lewis 1959: 39).

Lewis claims that Esperanza followed her mother’s advice and so she was a good wife albeit not a happy one.

Carlos Velez’s study of aging in Mexico provides further some examples of the traditional marriage scenario. For one of the couples, Dolorosa and Roberto, there are two sources of conflict . . . that have never been resolved. First, she berates him for having made their home in Netzahualcoyotl, although there is little she could do about where they live especially when he points out that, "Es mejor que la vida de mariachi y de gata" ("It is better than living the life of a mariachi and a servant" as her parents did). The second source of conflict is his occasional peccadillos with other women, which he explains as necessary for maintaining his business "conexiones". This rationalization of his extramarital affairs is not accepted by Dolorosa. Roberto, however, has often stated that Dolorosa merely wants a man who is tied and dependent on her. But he will have none of it: "El hombre no tiene que andar con explicaciones como el jefe de su casa y menos cuando él la sostiene con su sudor" ("The man as the head of the household does not have to offer explanations for his behavior, even less when he supports that household with his sweat") (1978: 114).

Roberto, as the head of the household, feels that he does not have to remain sexually faithful to his wife or consult her when making major decisions. He
feels she has no basis for complaint about either of these topics because with him she is living a life better than that of her parents. Furthermore, Roberto rationalizes his behavior by stating that Dolorosa just wants a man to be dependant on her, which would put him in danger of becoming *enculado*⁶.

Velez (1978: 127), found a similar example of conflict over sexual loyalty in the relationship of, Julieta and Arturo:

Early in their marriage, Julieta had considered divorcing Arturo, but Doña Margarita [Arturo’s mother] dissuaded her. She had taken Arturo aside and scolded him like a child. At the same time, Doña Margarita had also shown Julieta that all men were expected to be unfaithful, and that Arturo, especially, could never really be made "manso" (tame).

Julieta’s mother-in-law knew the expectations of marriage better than Julieta. She talked Julieta out of divorcing Arturo by explaining that men are not expected to be devoted, and that it would not be manly if he was.

My consultant, Hugo, told me that his father just brought home the money for the children, food, and rent and did not want to hear anything about them. Hugo’s mother had to take care of everything relating to the house. Díaz-Guerrero (1975: 9) noted this also:

[T]he husband must work and provide. He knows nothing, nor does he want to know anything, about what happens in the home. He demands only that all obey him and that his authority be unquestioned. Often, after working hours, he joins his friends and along with them proceeds with a life no different from that he practiced when unmarried.

⁶Velez, translates *enculado* to mean "being a slave to a female" (1978: 118), but according to my consultants the term is very vulgar and I believe the best translation is "pussy-whipped". To be *enculado* is considered much worse than being *mandilon*. 
Unlike wives, husbands give up nothing of their single lives when they marry. The principle attribute that distinguishes a new husband is the additional financial responsibility of a family. His social behavior is not expected to change.

Hugo does not expect his marriage to be the same as his parents. He is still single, but does plan on marrying someday. He wants to be involved with his family and participate in household activities. He would not stop his wife from working outside the home, but neither would he encourage her. He sees that there have been changes in marriage in the past few years. According to Hugo, men traditionally got married not for a companion but for a slave. Presently, because of better education, Hugo believes, marriage is becoming more balanced and women are getting respect and equality in the work force and the households. This may be so, but as Durham (1991: 57-8), shows, the schema change is incomplete:

[T]he traditional model of the sexual division of labour determines that wage labor is the function of the husband who, as the head of the family, provides for its maintenance. The wife is assigned responsibility for domestic work and the children. We know that, despite this fact, women are increasingly forced or motivated to look for profitable activities inside or outside their homes. However, . . . this contribution is defined as 'helping' that of the husband, and is therefore subordinate and merely complementary in its partial maintenance of the house, the total validity of the traditional model is preserved, thus keeping its complete strength in defining the woman’s position in society.

This quote reinforces D’Andrade’s notion that different behavior within a social role does not necessarily index a different schema. Durham’s theory is that
female wage-earning is rationalized by being considered ancillary to the male’s. Rather than changing the female’s role, this reasoning allows the maintenance of the traditional scenario of marriage.

Though women may be more respected in contemporary marriages, other elements of the traditional marriage schema remain prominent. My consultant, Maria, and her husband, Luis, have been married (*juntos*) for a little over three years. They have one son who just turned two years old and Maria dedicates her time to child care and household activities. She keeps her house immaculate and never fails to have dinner prepared for Luis when he gets home from work. Each week Luis gives her money to go grocery shopping and pay the bills.

Maria makes all household decisions, including what to eat and how to decorate. All child rearing is left up to her. This is not to say that Luis is uninvolved in their son’s life. He is affectionate and plays with the child. It just means that decisions on childrearing are made by Maria. She described herself as being in charge of the inside while Luis is in charge of the outside. He controls all the financial dealings, such as working, savings, and all major purchases (houses, cars) or business dealings. Neither Maria nor Luis hesitates to voice their opinions about situations in areas where the other is in charge, but the final decision is up to the respective administrator.

Another young couple, Hector and his wife Julia, have been married (*separado*) two years. They have a one year old son. Both Hector and Julia go
to law school and work, so both spend time on child care. Hector also participates in household tasks such as laundry and food preparation, but only if there are no women around. If both he and Julia are home, she is the one who cooks and cleans. Like Maria, it is she who decides how the baby is to be raised.

The motivation behind these scenarios can be explained by goals of marriage. Some goals of Mexican marriage were ascertained by Mathews (1992: 142) while working in a community in the state of Oaxaca, in southern Mexico:

Marriage for my informants is both a necessity for the achievement of adult status and a means to achieve other ends. Women want children and the status and security they provide; men want success and community-recognized status. Marriage makes the attainment of these life goals a possibility, and marital expectations are framed accordingly.

She went on to state that women "expect a husband to father children and support them financially. They do not expect a husband to be sexually faithful or . . . [to] take . . . interest in raising children" (Mathews 1992: 142). Men, on the other hand, expect wives that "will bear children and support this status quest. A wife must willingly meet her husband's sexual needs, although she is not usually expected to enjoy the experience" (Mathews 1992: 142). She must be faithful; service to family should always come first. In fact, Mathews (1992: 141) stated, "The most important life goal for women in the Oaxacan community I studied is to have children" because they are a sign of adult
status, contribute household help and provide future security.

Velez (1978: 114), recognized that Roberto and Dolorosa did seem to help each other achieve these goals:

For Roberto, Dolorosa has fulfilled his expectations of what he conceives as middle-class order. In few homes were plastic doilies as prevalent as in theirs, the clear glass ashtrays and purple-glass swans so obvious, and the ming-style lamps in dragon colors so ostentatious. She "fits" his image of what the proper middle-class woman in Mexico should be.

No doubt Dolorosa fits the neighbor's image of middle-class as well, thereby, helping to provide Roberto with community status. Dolorosa also benefits from their marriage:

Dolorosa has payoffs that can be inferred from observation. She has succeeded in meeting her basic "pretenciosa" goal of middle-class status; she is her own mistress in what can be considered an elaborate setting in Netzahualcoyotl; she has a "gata" (alley-cat maid) over whom she exercises authority; she is able to spend her monthly allowance of 2000 pesos as she pleases as long as the household expenses are met; and, significantly, she does not have to communicate with neighbors whom she considers "communes" (common). In addition, she has two sons: one very much like her, and the other very much like his father (Velez 1978: 115).

In her marriage to Roberto, Dolorosa gets the financial support that allows her to live in the manner that she wants and children who will continue to take care of her throughout her life. "It is not that the content of the relation between Roberto and Dolorosa does not contain warmth and even love. But ... for each of them there is the fear that the relation is a temporary convenience for the other, even though they have remained together for seventeen years" (Velez 1978: 113).

A traditional Mexican marriage scenario includes a couple, usually a
macho male and a compliant female, with joint or separate property. The man
works outside the home and is expected to contribute financially to the
household. The woman requires pecuniary support in return for caring for her
husband and children. Both the husband and wife consider fecundity as
important and have children soon after marriage. Congeniality and faithfulness
are not required of the husband for the wife to achieve the goals defined by
Mathews. The husband can only be as amicable and faithful as machismo
allows so that his quest for community status will not be denied. The couples
engaged in these types of scenarios are called esposo and esposa.

Mexican Cultural Scenarios of Free Union

Couples living in union libre, free union, have been common in Mexico
for centuries. Fromm and Maccoby (1970: 44) found "Fourteen percent of the
villagers [from the state of Morelos] consider themselves married by free union.
Generally, they are the poorest people, for whom the cost of either the civil
papers or the more expensive church ceremony is prohibitive." Whether it be
for economic reasons or not, the couples living together in free union do not
legally marry. Instead they share a household and perform the same roles as
married partners do, including having children. Relationships of free union are
socially acceptable but not recognized as being legitimate by the church or civil
law (Lewis 1959: 17). However, if the couple stays together for five years, the
children are considered legitimate under the law.

The couples of free union in Five Families seemed to keep their property and finances separate, especially if the woman worked. A good example is a discussion between Guillermo Gutiérrez and his partner Julia: "They talked back and forth and finally decided that she owed him four pesos aside from her total debt to him of one hundred and thirty pesos" (Lewis 1959: 168). Obviously, if they had common finances, the issue of financial debt would not arise. Jesús Sánchez, also in Lewis' ethnography, had several free union relationships. He won money in the National Lottery and decided to build a house on the outskirts of Mexico City. Jesús convinced one of his partners in free union, Lupita, to move into the house and take care of the birds and pigs that he raised to sell. In return for doing this, he supported Lupita and her children and grandchildren, but only if she followed his rules. As she was caring for the chickens one day, she commented to them, "Your master says that's what he wants and that it is his money" (Lewis 1959: 239). She took care of all his animals and his house to his exact specifications but was never given part ownership in anything.

Lewis (1959: 16) characterizes Jesús as "unusual among lower-class Mexican men because of his strong sense of responsibility to his various wives and children, none of whom he has abandoned. As in many lower-class families, his marriages have been of the free union . . . type." Jesús, has more
than one free union relationship at a time, which means he has two or more households to support at all times. He had to work several jobs, leaving him little time to participate in any household more than financially—even if he wanted too. One of Jesús’ wives, Lupita, complained to him about this:

She spoke angrily to Jesús about having children here and there with so many women. His answer was threatening. "You don’t have much right to be high and mighty," he had said. "You have food and a home, which not everyone has. So what if I have children with you? They are old enough to work and take care of themselves now" (Lewis 1959: 235).

Lupita was going beyond social expectations of her relationship with Jesús, so he pointed out to her that she should be happy that he supported her and her children at all.

Further examples of fiscal obligations of the male in a free union relationship comes from a discussion over Guillermo Gutiérrez’s step-daughter’s plight and Lupita’s recollections of the past. The step-daughter’s husband withheld money and denied her permission to work, so she was unable to feed her children. Alfredo, Guillermo’s brother-in-law, said, "After all, if I am so proud that I don’t want my wife to work I’ll bring her and the kids food and that settles it. What is so hard about it?" (Lewis 1959: 164). Lupita had a partner in free union before Jesús and she remembered "that at times he would come home late but I just kept my mouth shut. They say, ’If a woman has what she needs at home, she has no reason to keep an eye on her husband. A man is free, a man belongs in the street.’ And so, like it or not, I’d put up with
it all" (Lewis 1959: 224). Both quotes emphasize the male responsibility to provide the female and her children with the necessities of life. They also demonstrate that the man is responsible for nothing beyond the necessities; he has no other obligations to the woman. If the man is providing these things the female partner in free union has no basis for complaint.

Most women have children or step-children with their partners in free union. Antonia, daughter of Jesús and Lupita, was talking about her children and their father: "He wants us to get married, but I say then he can take away my children. I said to him that we are well off this way, so why marry? He also wants us to have a house, but with what he gives his sister every eight days he hardly has any money left for me" (Lewis 1959: 253). Antonia considers her children to be an asset and she does not want to risk the possibility of losing them. Without them she would have nothing of her own and no security in the future, and so she chooses to remain living in free union.

Though free union seems to be more common in the lower class, it is not found exclusively among the poor. There are couples living in free union in the middle and upper classes, although it is not considered quite as socially acceptable. Their relationships are reminiscent of the lower class free union marriages in substance even though a higher standard of living makes them appear to be different. Lewis (1959: 317) described a couple who are quite wealthy yet living in free union.
Isabel met David at a dance and had found him attractive. . . . They went to Acapulco and informed their families that they had eloped. David had promised to marry her but once she had yielded to him he would not go through with the ceremony. She had to be content with his assurance that he would support her in style.

David was a self-made millionaire, therefore Isabel was able to live in style. She did not have to perform any of the domestic chores because they had three live-in servants. She received a monthly allowance to cover household expenses but nothing more. Because all money and property was David’s, she had to ask him whenever she wanted to buy anything for herself or their children. Like the lower class women, Isabel depended on her mate for money. She had to passively accept her spouse’s behavior.

[David] made [Isabel] beg for money, he struck her with little provocation, and he flaunted himself before her as a Don Juan. He had once gone so far as to ask her to give him an injection which she discovered to be testosterone, a male hormone that he took to stimulate his sexual powers. Since he made sexual demands of her only once a month, she knew he must be taking the hormone "so that he could be more of a man with his sweetheart" (Lewis 1959: 309).

Like his lower class counterparts, David had a mistress and a second household to support. Also like the other men living in free union, he did not feel that his behavior was inappropriate or needed to be hidden from his partner.

The Mexican cultural scenario of union libre consists of a couple living together but keeping their finances separate. The man is constrained by custom to provide the woman and her children with food and shelter (or money for those things) but nothing more. He has no obligation help with child care or household chores, nor is he expected to be faithful. Women must accept their
situation, and they want to have children for future security. Lewis (1959: 17) concluded, "the husband is clearly the dominant and authoritarian figure. All the husbands except Señor Gutiérrez have had extramarital affairs and illegitimate children and three are supporting a mistress or casa chica at the present time." Often couples living in free union refer to each other as mi hombre and mi mujer (my man, my woman). However, in many other Lewis citations the partner in a free union is referred to as husband or wife, which I assume is translated from esposo and esposa.

Who is an Esposa?

In Mexican cultural schemas of marriage and free union, the only difference is the legal recognition of the relationship. Both types of unions are socially acceptable, though having a religious ceremony is the ideal. Fromm and Maccoby (1970: 148-149) described families from the village they studied in Morelos:

In families headed by productive men, there is dignity and concern for fulfilling one’s obligations, for being formal y cumplido. The wives are modest and submissive, but protective and loving, especially to small children. One is struck by the rather cool formality that is maintained between the members of the family, even between husband and wife. The village patriarch is suspicious, guarded, possessive of what he owns, which includes his wife and family. He may be unfaithful to his wife, but he does not feel he has betrayed her, as long as he supports his family. In some cases, the richer men may even set up a second household (casa chica) with a common-law wife. The double standard prevails. He considers his obligation to his wife is responsible material care and protection, but not deep love.

Husbands and wives in Fromm and Maccoby’s study lead basically separate
lives. As long as the husband fulfills his obligation to financially support his family, neither his wife nor the rest of the community expects him to moderate his behavior from that of a single man. Husbands and the rest of the community, do however, have behavioral expectations of wives.

Women are expected to treat themselves as property that belongs to men. . . Essentially, she is confined to the home, which she is expected to keep clean and ordered. Washing and sweeping take more of her time than cooking. Most wives are limited to a small budget, normally provided by the male, . . . Often she must submissively beg her husband for money. The cultural traditions also stress female submissiveness, dependence, and inferiority (Fromm and Maccoby 1970: 146).

Whether married legally or not, men and women take on the same roles in the alliance: Men are expected to be macho and women relatively submissive.

Even though I did not find the extreme male dominance or female abnegation among the Mexican couples with whom I consulted, the traditional schema of marriage can still be seen. In all cases, men are required to bring home money but not required to participate in child care or domestic chores. In neither type of relationship are men obligated to remain devoted. It is not uncommon for both married men and men in free union to have other women. Lewis (1959: 17) stated that only one husband of the five families in his ethnography did not have a second woman at the time of his research and Carlos said that real macho men are always looking for women. Whether married or united freely, men can achieve community status by being macho and prolific.
Mexican women are supposed to passively accept whatever their men do and say regarding business outside of the household. Only when the males fail to provide adequate funding is dissatisfaction deemed legitimate. Having children is important to the women, in both marriage and free union, as they depend on having children to provide them with security for the future. Having children also opens the doors to the adult world. Díaz-Guerrero (1975: 91) stated, "The present study does in fact show that prestige or status—can be accorded the Mexican woman simply for their age, or because they are mothers . . . ." Therefore, the female goals of having children to achieve adult status and to provide for future security can be achieved either by getting married or living in free union.

In both marriage and free union it is normal to keep finances divided. There seems no significant difference in the two types of union with respect to household finances. It is true that, in marriage, some couples combine finances rather than keep them separate. It is also true that I found no examples of couples in free union with joint finances. Nevertheless, I believe the two types of relationships follow essentially the same schema in this respect.

Hector noticed that cohabitation among middle class, educated young couples has become more common in the last five years. Hugo claims that he knows some people that live together but that he does not plan on cohabiting, because as it is still not accepted by the majority of the middle class.
(1989: 253) thought that "because young men distrust liberal women, the number of couples living together before marriage remains low." Unfortunately, I never met any people that were *cohabitan juntos* while I was in Mexico. Therefore, I am not able to detail any *cohabitan juntos* scenarios. However, as I said before, I suspect that the scenarios may be similar to that of American cohabitation. I did learn that partners in these couples sometimes refer to each other as *compañero* and *companion* (companion).

In one of my discussions with Hector, he used the term *esposa* to refer to the female partner of a cohabiting relationship:

*Sí una pareja tiene hijos pero no están casados ni por ley ni por nada, solamente viven juntos, la esposa y el hijo de la esposa pueden tener juntos herencias y legados o reclamar para, si el reconocimiento del hijo de los dos, o-- sea de los concubino-- o sea está regulado también por la ley o solamente cuando viven juntos por cinco años.*

If a couple has children but they aren't married either by the law or anything, only live together, the wife and the son of the wife can have together inheritance and legacies or in order to claim, if the son is recognized as from both, or --that is of the concubines-- that is ruled also by the law but only if they live together for five years.

Under Mexican law, children of couples living in free union for five years or more are considered legitimate. The relationship, however, is still not legally bound. Legality is not considered when applying the terms *esposo* and *esposa* because it is irrelevant to attaining the goals of Mexican life.

The expectations and goals of marriage and free union are the same. With the scenarios being so similar it makes sense that the nomenclature *esposo* and *esposa* can be applied to either because the scene that those words are
dragging into the hearer's imagination is identical. Although the scenario of *cohabitan juntos* may be slightly skewed from *union libre* regarding reproductive expectations, schemas are flexible, so the terms *esposo* and *esposa* may be extended to those partners as well.
Oscar Lewis (1959: 3) said, "In studying a culture through the intensive analysis of specific families we learn what institutions mean to individuals."

The method has enabled ethnographers to discover general cultural scenarios of American and Mexican marriage and cohabitation. American scenarios of marriage differ markedly from those of Mexicans in their ideas, goals and expectations. Therefore, when terms such as husband/wife and esposo/esposa are used differently it is because they index different scenarios.

In American marriages, the terms husband and wife signal a high degree of commitment. Marriage is a step taken by two people who intend to remain together permanently. They consolidate money and property. They usually have children; and they depend on each other emotionally. They have strong mutual obligations. Marriage in America results in a nearly complete merger of two individuals into one.

Cohabiting couples live together on a semi-permanent basis, often to determine if marriage is a possibility. They separate money and fiscal
responsibilities and they do not expect to have children. Although the partners depend on each other emotionally, they maintain more autonomy than a married couple. Consequently, cohabiting couples cannot be called husband and wife. These terms are reserved as indices of the more highly committed relationship of marriage.

In Mexican marriages, the terms esposo and esposa are used, not to index degree of commitment, but as signs of adult status. A man achieves this status when he establishes a continuing relationship with at least one woman who bears his children. This makes him appear macho and prolific and gains him respect in the community. Women also gain adult status and ensure a secure future through having children. Even though females are often financially dependant, partners continue their personal independence and lead nearly separate lives. In Mexico, couples in free union live by the same scenarios as married couples. Therefore, partners in both types of unions are justifiably thought of as esposo and esposa.

Because schemas are changeable with no concrete expectations, the existence of exceptions does not require the existence of other schemas. A schema can be applied flexibly to allow the comprehension of different situations (Durham 1991: 55). Even though American cohabitations are not characterized by progeny, a Mexican scenario of esposo/esposa can credibly be applied. It is obvious that the couple has an ongoing sexual relationship, which
could be construed as a manifestation of adulthood for both the man and woman. The male appears macho even if the female’s future is not secured. In addition, the preservation of autonomy seen in cohabiting couples is considered standard for all couples in Mexico. Thus it is logical, from a Mexican standpoint to call members of American cohabiting couples *esposo/esposa* even though those terms are commonly translated into English as *husband/wife.*
APPENDIX I

STATEMENT ON ETHICS

PRINCIPLES OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY
Adopted by the Council of the American Anthropological Association
May 1971
(As amended through October 1990)

I. Responsibility to people whose lives and cultures anthropologists study

Anthropologists' first responsibility is to those whose lives and cultures they study. Should conflicts of interest arise, the interests of these people take precedence over other considerations. Anthropologists must do everything in their power to protect the dignity and privacy of the people whom they work, conduct research or perform other professional activities. Their physical, social and emotional safety and welfare are the professional concerns of the anthropologists who have worked among them.

A. The rights, interests, safety, and sensitivities of those who entrust information to anthropologists must be safeguarded.

1. The right of those providing information to anthropologists either to remain anonymous or to receive recognition is to be respected and defended...

2. Anthropologists should not reveal the identity of groups or persons whose anonymity is protected through the use of pseudonyms.

3. The aims of all their professional activities should be clearly communicated by anthropologists to those among whom they work.

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7Only the most relevant passages are reproduced here.
## APPENDIX II

### CONSULTANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME (AGE)</th>
<th>ETHNICITY</th>
<th>EDUCATION LEVEL</th>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</th>
<th>YEARS TOGETHER</th>
<th>METHODS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Betty (27)</td>
<td>Americans</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Chemical Engineer</td>
<td>$60,000/year</td>
<td>3 Cohabiting</td>
<td>Participant Observation/Consultation</td>
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</table>

*8Incomes of Mexicans working in Mexico were not collected.*
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