Reflections on cultural constructions of gender relationships in Mexico*

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Abstract
The present essay explores cultural constructions of gender relationships in Mexico. Social researchers have, in recent years, increasingly focused on analyzing and explaining the notable transformations of gender relationships since the 1970s. However, the majority of the research has been conducted with a predominantly socio-economic or sociodemographic approach, as well as sometimes a political one. This text, wants to contribute to closing these gaps. Based on a brief review of the existing academic literature, it is argued that the constitution of gender relations in Mexico should be understood in terms of long-term, multi-stage, and multi-level processes of cultural globalization, hybridization, and the mixing and interpenetration of heterogeneous cultural elements from diverse internal and external sources.

Key words: gender relationships, cultural construction, gender, Mexico.

Introduction
Throughout the last three decades, the gender relations in Mexico have experimented deep transformations due to factors such as economic crises, and the economic neoliberal policies, the cultural and economic

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globalization processes, as well as the new social and feminist movements (Chant, 1991; Chant and Craske, 2003; Cravey, 1997; Amuchástegui, 2001; Salles and Tuirán, 1998; Ariza and de Oliveira, 2004a). In recent years, social investigation on the subject has been more and more interested in analysing and explaining the role of these transformations in the contemporary constitution of the gender relationships in Mexico. However, the majority of these studies have been conducted with a predominantly socio-economic or sociodemographic approach, as well as sometimes a political one.1 Despite the fact that there are some relevant studies (e.g. Salles and Valenzuela, 1998; Salles and Tuirán, 1998; Gutmann, 1996; Gutmann, 2003; Hirsch, 2003; Irwin, 2003; Irwin et al., 2003; Amuchástegui, 2001; Szasz y Lerner, 1998; Mirandé, 1997; Carrillo, 2002) that analyse the cultural dimension of the gender relationships, they are still too few and seem insufficient to first understand the constitution of the contemporary cultural logics regarding the gender relationships, and then, the complex, heterogeneous and variable ways Mexican people use these logics to understand and perform their gendered interpersonal relationships in their everyday life. These investigations have tended to focus on specific social groups, such as the urban popular classes or peasants, but have dedicated little attention to the rest of the groups, for example the urban middle classes. This essay explores the cultural constructions of the gender relationships in Mexico, with the intention of contributing closing this gap. From a brief revision of the relevant academic literature I shall develop the argument that the constitution of the gender relationships in Mexico has to be understood from the consideration of the historic processes in different stages, of cultural and hybridization globalization in several levels, as well as the combination and interpretation of heterogeneous cultural elements from the internal and external sources. Individuals utilize different and varied cultural patterns that coexist in the contemporary Mexican society in an equally variable way, and sometimes contradictory, in order to understand their experiences and to formulate action

1 For a revision of the respective academic literature in Latin America, Europe and the United Status, see Chant and Craske (2003) and Ariza and de Oliveira (2004).
strategies concerning particular problems and situations (Swidler, 2001). In order to enumerate these complex processes of the social investigation, the frequent use of dual vocabulary that presents the transit of the “traditional” social forms towards the “modern” ones —basically in a socioeconomic sense—. In my opinion, this approach seems limited, since it does not allow the adequate conceptualization of the aforementioned complexities. Later I shall explore these ideas based on preliminary findings of a current empiric research\(^2\) on the cultural constructions of the couple relationships among young professionals and academics in Mexico City. I shall also document some significant aspects of the cultural environment of these middle class Mexicans from the exploration of the argumentative patterns of a self-help books and magazines selection consumed by this sector of the population. I finish this essay with some reflexive questions about the possible future lines of investigation about the gender and culture issues in Mexico.

Cultural constructions of gender relationships in Mexico

Literature revision on contemporary gender relations

There is no doubt that the order of Mexican gender has suffered important transformations throughout the last three last decades.\(^3\) Despite the complex constitution of the gender relationships and the need for differentiation in terms of class, ethnicity, locality, and other forms of social inequity, until the middle or end of the 1970 decade, research has highlighted the prevalence of patriarchal structures\(^4\) in the gender relationships: tendencies to authority and power systematic divisions favouring men; work generic divisions, reserving access to the public sphere, employment and politics to men, and confining women to a

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\(^2\) Between June 2003 and March 2005 I performed some interviews and gathered cultural documents in Mexico City and Cuernavaca, Morelos. The most important purposes of this project are: the description, analysis and limited explanation of the general meanings young professionals and academics have regarding the central dimensions of the couple relationships and the ways they use these meanings to construct experiences and relevant practices. I document the cultural context of the participants through the analysis of relevant “cultural documents” such as magazines, self-help books, the script of a soup opera, newspaper articles, etc. This research project is part of my Ph. D. in Sociology from the Essex University (UK), and is supported by the United Kingdom Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and a Ph. D. scholarship from the Essex University. I have received really important academic support as a visitor in the Colegio de Mexico and Mexico City CIESAS.

\(^3\) En cuanto al concepto de ‘orden de género’ (gender order) véase: Connell (1987 y 2002).

\(^4\) Uso el concepto de patriarcado de manera descriptiva para designar desigualdades sistemáticas en las relaciones de género en términos de relaciones afectivas, sexuales, de poder y producción. No uso este concepto según las líneas respectivas de teoría feminista.
domestic and private sphere; besides an authoritarian organization of the society around the specific patriarchal models of a family that correspond, partly, to particular interpretations of Catholicism (Estainou, 2005; Stern, 1995; McGinn, 1966; Hirsch, 2003; Cicchne, 1997; Dore, 1997; Irwin et al., 2003; Careaga, 1984). It does not seem exaggerated to asseverate that gender relationships in Mexico, at least from the beginning of the decade of 1980, have become more complex. Despite the fact that some patriarchal patterns are still valid, today, there are more accessible religious alternatives, as well for practices and beliefs, for Mexicans. An example of this is that for many Mexican women it is easier to imagine, choose and carry off life projects that differ from the patriarchal paths oriented to marriage at a certain age, followed by maternity and a domestic life in the matrimonial sphere. In return, the access to a higher education, an extensive participation in the labor market or the life as a single person have become feasible alternatives for many of them (García and de Oliveira, 1994; García and de Oliveira, 1995; García and de Oliveira, 1997; Hirsch, 2003). These transformations have been frequently studied from very specific perspectives in the academic literature. Social research has been preoccupied fundamentally for explaining the socioeconomic, demographic and politic elements of these processes, showing a very limited interest in their cultural aspects. In this matter, I consider convenient to take up again the concept of “culture” as Swidler defines it:

According to the classic definition of Geertz (1973: 89), culture is “a transmitted pattern throughout history, of meanings that are manifested by symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic ways by which men can communicate, preserve and develop their knowledge and their attitudes towards life.” Seeing the culture as manifested meanings in symbols draws the attention towards phenomena such as beliefs, ritual practices, forms of art, ceremonies and informal cultural practices as language, gossip, stories and the daily life rituals. I would take up again “the Ulf Hannerz’s minimalist definition of culturalness” (1969: 184) according to… the conventional use essence… that there are social processes of sharing ways of behavior and of seeing the life within a community.” But I would add Geertz’s emphasis in the role of the particular symbolic vehicles (rituals, stories, sayings) in the creation and maintenance of these behavior and thinking ways. Actually, the culture is specifically the aggregate of symbolic vehicles by which these processes of sharing and learning take place (Swidler 2001; 12).

Most of the studies published in Mexico on contemporary gender relationships could be divided, according to Araiza and Oliveira’s classification (2004b), into
a sociodemographic line, a socioeconomic line and a sociocultural line. The prevalence of the former two is clearly visible due to the large quantity of publications and the importance researchers have given them. Actually Ariza and de Oliveira (2004b: 10) mention that the “demographic dimension is the one that has received more attention” in this field of research and explain that the “socioeconomic dimension of the familiar world has also been object of special interest”. Later they introduce briefly the sociocultural dimension of the gender relationships, but they do not use equally positive descriptions to describe it. In general, the studies with a sociocultural approach position in the research on gender relations in Mexico an in Mexican academic circles seem to be marginal. The international panorama is similar to that given the apparent prevalence of research within the conceptual framework of the development studies. This argument can be illustrated by examining the Chant and Craske (2003) recent revision of the most important studies on “Gender in Latin America”. Their book is divided in several chapters that revise the most important research lines of this research area such as “gender and poverty”, “gender and health”, “gender and employment” or “gender and sexuality”. Although potentially relevant, it does not contain any chapter on “gender and culture” of something alike. The book has a distinctive approach on the socioeconomic, demographic and politic patterns, and as a consequence, the large bibliography fundamentally contains references to literature in those areas and does no pay attention to alternative research lines. I shall now explore some relevant characteristics of the predominant research lines on the subject. The first noticeable aspect of the mentioned pattern in the academic literature is the frequent supposition, but few times explicitly defined, of an economic determination of the gender relationships. A large part of the academic literature on this line is directed to explaining the recent transformations of the gender relationships, even more from the economic crises that have hit Mexico since the 1980s and their secondary effects (e.g. Chant 1991; Gonzalez de la Rocha, 1988; Gonzalez de la Rocha y Escobar, 1991; Fernández, 1983). The crises effects, as the growing incorporation of women to the working force in order to face the income slope or the “male purveyors” loss of employment, are highlighted as central elements of the changes in the gender relations and studied in a very detailed way. But, some cultural developments, for example the growing influence of the global mass media are mentioned only briefly; frequently subsidiary arguments are used to contextualize economic or demographic development without being deeply examined and supported with empiric detailed data. Since this economic
determinism there is a noticeable tendency in the academic literature towards the changes discussion in the gender relationships, but in the terms established by an analytic vocabulary built around the modernization concept. This vocabulary presume a more or less lineal social life’s pattern transformation in general, and in particular those of the gender relationships, from some kind of “traditional or “patriarchal” social forms towards some kind of more “modern”, open, and plural forms, through demographic, economic and also cultural developments. The concepts of “tradition” and “modernity” are used in the respective literature, in fact, in a variable way, through all of it and within particular texts. In general, there is not an explicit discussion of this diversity in their meanings. The concept of “tradition”, for example, is used throughout the academic literature with various implicit meanings. Among others, it is used to refer to integrated sets of beliefs and practices which describe for example, patriarchal gender arrangements, in terms of work and power division in the households of the Mexican society at certain historic moments. It is also used to refer to a system of integrated beliefs that do not clearly correspond to practice patterns. When the gender and culture issues are discussed from those patterns, there is a tendency to present them in terms of integrated gender beliefs systems about issues (Deaux and Kite, 1987), unitary and general and not in terms of variable and complex cultural repertoires (Swidler, 2001) used by different actors in an equally variable, localized and potentially contradictory way. These two ways of writing about “tradition” and “modernity” there is also a tendency of position them as two more or less predetermined social change poles, among which transformation occur in a more or less lineal way. Thirdly, the concept of “tradition” is also used to refer to beliefs or practices localized systems of particular social groups such as the indigenous people, colonial creole population, etc. Further this relative absence of the cultural in the relevant conceptual discussions in the literature on gender relationships, there is another problem, a bigger one, concerning the concept of “modernization” and its subsidiary concepts. I refer to its empirical validity and especially to its more unitary ways of use. Recent historic research (Esteinou, 2005; Cicерchia, 1997; Dore, 1997; Stern, 1995; Merrell, 2003) has highlighted a great diversity of social life forms throughout Mexican history, which allows us to talk about more than just particular “traditions” and “modernity”. Both are carefully localized and examined in the historic places and periods, and particular social groups to which they correspond. In fact, from this idea raises the question that if the

5 For other remarkable theoretical models, see: Coronado (2003).
analytical vocabulary of “modernization” offers the potential to deal these empirical complexities in a proper way or if bigger theoretical reconsiderations are necessary which allow us to go further than this limited vocabulary.

Given this research hegemony about gender relationships in Mexico from a demographic, socioeconomic, and of development perspective, there are not many studies and researchers who explore its cultural side (e.g. Salles and Valenzuela; 1998; Salles and Tuirán, 1998; Hirsch, 2003; Gutmann, 1996; Mirandé, 1997; Carrillo, 2002). In fact, this research has taken place at a humanities area and not in a social sciences area (e.g. Gutiérrez de Velasco, 2003; Irwin, 2003), which very probably has led to the establishment of a particular approach in the analysis of “cultural documents” in the literature, films an art, instead of its study in an equally valuable from other more immediate forms of social interaction. Certain recent discussions in the social sciences in Mexico, and internationally, on issues such as post modernity, the non-economic elements of globalization and the relation between gender and culture (e.g. Coronado y Hodge, 2004; García Canclini, 1999; García Canelini, 1990; Beverley et al., 1995; Jameson y Miyoshi, 2003; del Sarto et al., 2004; Nederveen Pieterse, 2004) have been scarcely incorporated to the discussions on gender relationships in Mexico (some exceptions are from example Salles y Valenzuela, 1998; Amuchástegui, 2001, y Jiménez, 2003). Although there are a limited number of important studies on gender and culture in Mexico, a meaningful analytical vocabulary, or a coherent portrait of empirical patterns about the sociocultural aspect of gender relationships as an alternative to the modernization model has not been established yet.

Culture as an independent sphere of the social life

Given the particular approach of a great part of the academic literature on contemporary gender relationships in Mexico, it could be considered right to develop complementary perspectives to explore in a more detailed way the cultural dimension. In this context, the constitution of “culture has first to be affirmed, in the sense of the previously given definition, as an analically independent sphere of the social life. Both the symbolic structures, which define the meaning of different ways of thinking, feeling and behaving, and the ways the individual actors use the elements given by those structures, seen to be constituted in a way that cannot be deduced in a lineal and clear way from the
constitution of economic, demographic or politic structures (Swidler, 2001; Strauss, 1998). Despite the fact that the cultural patterns can be related in a very close or parallel way to other structures and institutional arrangements (Swidler 2001), they seem to follow a Sui generic social logic.

This argument can be illustrated based on the recent study by Jennifer Hirsch (2003) on conjugal life and sexuality patterns in a transnational community of Mexicans living in two Mexico towns and in Atlanta City, USA. Hirsch reveals the changes in the meanings of marriage, sexuality and reproduction in this community, which show the existence of the ideal of a companionate marriage based on trust and sexual intimacy. Marriage between young couples, as Hirsch mentions, does not imply being together —as happens with previous generations— because of mutual respect and the fulfillment of generic obligations such as house work and maternity for women. But factors such as friendship, trust and creation of affective ties have become central for those couples. So in order to maintain the relationship is necessary a constant courtship after marriage. This change, for many of its participants, is related to the idea of modernity and the attempts of creating a more progressive, open, and rational relationship, free of the restrictions experimented by their parents. These “partners’s marriages”, the meaning of sexuality tends to reside in the experience of intimacy and the mutual satisfaction instead of reproduction and the women’s obligation of satisfying their husbands as part of the marital bargain, as happened to their parents’ generation. Sex can be negotiated according to the individual preferences, which, for example, can allow women to deny sexual intercourse with their husbands instead of satisfying them. The changes in the meaning of sexuality, according to Hirsch, are also manifested in the transformation of the reproductive practices among many young couples. These transformations include the delay of the first pregnancy after marriage, in comparison to previous generations, which allows couples to enjoy their company and stabilize the relationship, a decrease in the number of children desired among young women, and more acceptances of the modern contraceptive methods. When emphasizing these changes, Hirsh carefully qualifies and recognizes their tentative character, as well as the persistence of more “traditional” marital and sexual norms among many young couples. Far from leaving these “traditional” models completely behind, Hirsch includes that the ideal of the “partner’s marriage” based on trust and sexual intimacy, coexists with the “traditional”. For the young participants of her study face complex decisions about the construction of successful couple relationships. Hirsch
explains the generational tendency towards the constitution of couple relationships based on friendship, as well as the existing differences among their young participants in relation to the socioeconomic and demographic development in Mexico. She identifies relevant factors such as the decrease of the fecundity rates, the growing access to formal education, the diffusion of “modern” sexual ideals and of information about the sexualities through the mass media, as well as the migratory experiences to the United States, which can involve higher levels of privacy and individualism and an understanding of sexuality unattached to reproduction. Hirsch explains that the variations in their participant’s attitudes towards marriage and sexuality have their roots in the different levels of formal education and to the migrant’s access to different resources such as visas or cars, which could increase their exposition to the American culture. Hirsh highlights the complex range of viable decisions for the young Mexicans in the definitions of their sexual identities. The detailed character of their arguments is facilitated by their effective use of the bargaining theory, which allows the deep exploration of goals, strategies and resources involved in the forms in which their participants build their marriages and sexualities.

This long example describes an alternative approach to the study of the cultural dimensions in Mexico that goes further than the approach centred in the demographic and economic patterns, based on the lineal modernization vocabulary. Hirsch recognizes, and takes into account in her argumentation, the impact of the demographic and the economic issues in the lives of their participants, however, she goes further and proposes that the ways men and women in her study face those patterns vary in many considerable manners. In fact, she portrays them as constituted of a plural and variable way by the different cultural meanings that its participants acquired throughout their lives, for example, in relation to their migratory experiences. In Hirsch’s argument, the cultural patterns interact in a very important way with the demographic and economic structures. Migration, and the experiences it involves, resulted in part due to economic pressures, but the cultural transformations that took place, to a certain extent, from those experiences, are portrayed analytically, independently from the economic factors. It is necessary to go deeper in the previous arguments. When highlighting the importance of the “culture” in the construction of the gender relationships, I do not pretend to diminish the importance of the economic, demographic and political processes, or to argue that the cultural developments should be studied not taking into account those processes.
Moreover, it seems important to recognize that the political, demographic and economic issues are never simply that, but they have to be understood and examined as particular manifestation of cultural forms. In the same way, culture also has to be studied in terms of its specific economic, politic or demographic contexts. Instead of being determined by those structures, the cultural patterns interact with them in the constitution of the ways individual actors can think and experiment their gender relationships in their daily life. This idea can be illustrated with the relevant study of Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, México Profundo (Deep Mexico) (2003). One of the central arguments of this article is that Mexican society has to be analyzed in terms of the basic duality and the conflict between an “imaginary Mexico”, conformed by the social elites and the middle classes, living according to an occidental “modernization” project and rejecting the country’s indigenous roots; and a “deep Mexico”, which comprises the subaltem groups that reproduce in different manners the ways of social organization of the precolombine civilization. The nature of this division is fundamentally cultural and designs discordant patterns of symbolic meanings and practices related, according to which, the members of the different sectors of the Mexican society perform their daily lifes. However, the duality between the “imaginary Mexico” and the “deep Mexico” has also to be understood in economic and political terms. It corresponds to arrangements of power and dominion, to the control over economic resources, to planes and great scale policies for the future of Mexico and to class positions throughout the country’s history since Colony times. In this argumentative pattern, not one of the social spheres acquires an analytic supremacy, but they interact in a complex way in the formation of the Mexican society character.

**Culture as a repertoire**

Despite the fact that Hirsch does not elaborate further the theoretical implications of her results, given the fundamentally empirical approach of her study, her arguments support another significative idea: the importance of studying the “culture” not only in terms of great scale beliefs systems (Deaux y Kite, 1987) more or less homogeneous, but also un terms of the ways these patterns are appropriate and used by individuals in ther daily lifes. This idea is developed at a thoeretical level by Ann Swilder (2001), who does not conceptualize “culture” as a uniform system, but as a repertoire:
In order to describe how culture works we need new metaphors. We have to imagine the culture less as a large flow where we all are immersed, and more as a messy tricks hat or a tool box [...] that contains utensils with different shapes, which can more or less fit in our hands, that are not always easy to use and only sometimes are functional [...] Maybe it would be better to imagine culture as a repertoire, as that an actor, a dancer or a musician uses. This image suggests that the culture cultivates talents and habits in its users, so someone can be more or less skillfull at the cultural repertoires he or she is performing, and these cultural capabilities can exist as talents, habits and separated orientations, and as major arrangements as the parts a musician has learned. In this sense, people are in possession of an arrangement of cultural resources to which the can use. We can ask not only which sets are included in the repertoire, but also why some of them are put into practice in a certain moment and other in some other time (2001: 24f).

The “repertoire” metaphor allows Swidler to conceptualize the heterogeneous character or not always clearly integrated of cultural patterns at the society level in general. From this idea, she develops a detailed theoretical model of the ways some middle class people from California use their cultural repertoires talking about love and their experiences in liaisons. Even though it is not my intention to reproduce in detail the Swidler’s theoretical model, some of its elements should be highlighted. Not only the cultural patterns, at important institutions or the society in general level6 are, according to Swidler, heterogeneous and systematic in a partial way only; in the same way, individuals use different elements from the general patterns included in their repertoires in a variable way, specific about the situations and, hence, potentially contradictory based on the different institutional and situational contexts requirements. The ways in which individuals use their different available cultural resources, Swidler explains, to them are formed by the need of building viable action strategies related to these contextual requirements. In this model of “culture”, which can only be exposed in a rudimentary way in this text resides, in my opinion, the supposition that a fundamenta indetermination in the analytical movement from the cultural “structures” at a society in general level, towards the uses at an individual level of the given meanings by these same structures.

Propositions concerning the position of certain meaning structures in a society, a social class or a social group, do not allow by themselves inferences about the ways the individuals, who belong to this society, class or social group, use these meanings in their daily lifes, given the importance of personal and

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6 In this context see Swidler (2001: 187ff.) about the related concept of “cultural logics”.
situational variations. Therefore, it is not enough to fully understand the contemporary constitution of the gender relationships in the Mexican society, as it is commonly presented in the academic literature, in terms of the changes of the importance of different cultural patterns at large scale, as for example, the patriarchal, catholic, and authoritarian models, in comparison to more plural, secular, and equitative models. Rather, in order to deeper understand this thematic area it will be indispensable to consider also the ways in which, for example, a supposedly secular individualism, or a patriarchal catholisism are used by different indivuals and carefully examine the implications of the particular social contexts where these individuals life.

**Analyze gender and culture reports**

In this context it seems useful to use the different ways of analyzing individual models concerning the meanings and experiences of different aspects of the gender relationships. Plummer makes a distinction in the analytical use of the reports given by the interviews as a resource or subject:

> […] Seeing the phenomena as resources, we use them to see which ideas they offer in order to understand the social life […] we are interested in Roberta Menchu’s story because she will tell us what is it like to be a young revolutionary in Guatemala - the story helps us; it is a resource to understand. On the other hand, seeing the phenomena as subjects, we see them as research subjects by themselves; as themes of interest by themselves […] in this context I would like to know not only what can the story of life about meanings, moral and the lifes of a culture, but also how telling a story is also the product of a culture. Here the story itself becomes an object of study, why do people tell the story of their lifes? What leads them to tell the stories in a certain way? Would they tell them differently - or not at all - in different times and places? And, are there stories that just cannot be told; the called “silenced voices” (Plummer, 2001: 36ff.)

In the academic literature on gender relationships in Mexico, the individual stories are commonly used to acquire knowledge, for example, about middle class women attitudes and practices about extradomestic employment, house work and maternity (García and De Oliveira, 1997; García and De Oliveira, 1995), the way men and women in rural environments understand virginity and sexual initiation (Amuchástegui, 2001), or the survival strategies of the households in times of economic crises (González de la Rocha, 1988). However,
given the complex, multipolar and contextually specific character of the culture and it uses, it seems important to also analyze such stories by themselves, it means, in terms of their forms and discursive structures and what could these mean regarding the construction of the gender relationships at a cultural meaning level. In this sense, Swidler (2001) examines issues as the kind and number of the different cultural elements to which its participants went to when they were talking about love and liaisons in personal situations of stability, changes or crises; the ways in which they integrated the cultural elements among themselves; the way they fit the, and individualized them or kept them as distant “cultural recipies”; or the coherence among general, abstract meanings and experience stories of the daily life. According to the different structural patterns and the interaction of the different cultural elements in the individual stories of these elements —for example, a supposed patriarchal catholisism of voluntarist individualism— would vary considerably. Therefore, it seems essential to analyze the gender and culture stories not only as substantive information resources on different subjects, but also as subjects per se.

Gender relationships, globalization and cultural hybridation

Based on the theoretical suppositions previously detailed, now I shall explore some empirical patterns in the constitution of the gender relationships in Mexico. The empirical data here presented are preliminary results of a more extensive study on cultural constructions in the couple relationships among young academics and professionals in Mexico City. This study contextualized the stories of the participants’ lives with “cultural documents” consumed by them, such as magazines, newspaper articles or personal improvement books. I shall start my considerations examining this general cultural context present in a selection of these documents. Then I shall present some reflexive questions about the study of the ways my participants —members of the middle classes— or other Mexican people use the cultural elements given by the general cultural environment. Some of the ideas here presented come from the research I am undertaking among members of the middle classes in Mexico, which is the reason why they are referred in a context of a very particular reference. I cannot be supposed that the cultural patterns I am about to describe are constituted in the same way in other sectors of the Mexican society. However, this does not
seem problematic given the fact that general research lines I shall expose have the potential of generating equally interesting results—even divergent—, if they are applied to other social groups. Besides, studying Mexican social classes per se seems important since very little has been written about this society sector. It is important to recognize since the beginning the diversity and plurality that has characterized the order of the Mexican gender in any epoch, as well as the non-lineal character of the developments by which it has traveled. Instead of understanding these developments in terms of “modernization”, they can be conceptualized as hybridation processes, of “mixture” and interpretation of different social patterns within the Mexican society, or that even they are incorporate to it from the outside (García, 1996; García, 1995; García, 1990; Nederveen, 1997; Nederveen, 2004; Amuchástegui, 2001).

Regarding the cultural forms, the hybridation is defined as “the ways are separated from the existing practices and are recombined with new forms in new practices (Rowe y Schelling, 1991: 231). This principle is also applied to the structural forms of social organization (Nederveen, 2004: 64).

A basic example—which was possible to present only in a very schematic way—would be the conquest of the indigenous civilizations by the Spaniards and the ways this has inspired popular myths and academic works (Ramos, 1968; Paz, 2002; Mirandé, 1997) on machismo as a reaction to the conquest, and the “rape of the of indigenous women by the invaders”. Another more recent example would be the “openness” and pluralization of the ways of thinking about gender relationships from the reproductive health governmental programs, cultural foreign influences, etc. which now coexist and interact with patriarchal meanings (González, 1998; Villafuerte, 1998; Carrillo, 2002). For the last five centuries, Mexico has been deeply incorporated to the global historic developments and its society is characterized by a great deal of cultural forms and practices (Merrell, 2003). This hybridation is manifested in the society, both in terms of its relation with the exterior world as in terms of its interior organization. Its relation with the exterior world has been characterized by the mixture of cultural, political and social forms with foreign influences throughout its history, due to the frequent military invasions, catholisism adaptations—such as the Virgen de Guadalupe myth—, the adoption of political and philosophical models from Europe and the United States, or the preference of the end of the XIX century Mexican elites for the European architecture, art, and consumption goods, which have been incorporated to Mexico City’s façade in
a very particular way (Macías, 2003; Merrell, 2003; García, 1990). At an internal level, the Mexican culture is characterized by the variety and the sometimes deeply discordant ways of economic production, lifestyles, and spatial and temporal organizations forms. A noticeable example is the heterogeneous character of some cities such as Mexico City, where the “traditional” economies of subsistence coexist beside commercial and financial enterprises that use state-of-the-art technology and act internationally; when the middle and high sectors of the society enjoy westernly lifestyles and consumption practices, almost disconnected from the lifestyles of, for example, migrant peasants or impoverished indigenous people in other zones of the city (Bonfil, 2003). That is why instead of conceiving the Mexican culture as an independent system from the exterior, it seems important to understand its constitution, according to Urry’s (2000) recently proposed research lines, in terms of objects, meanings, ideas and people’s globalized, variable and fragmented mobilities in global nets of diverse manners. Both the emergency of central historic tendencies in the organization of the gender relationships and the persistent contradictions and the different ways of understanding and practising the gender that bases these tendencies, they should be conceptualized as a result of this diversity and not as uniform consequences of the “modernization” processes. The hybrid character of the Mexican society, in this case at a gender relationships level, can be documented even more examining the means of communication by which the participants of the mentioned study, as well as other middle class Mexicans are informed about gender, sexuality, etc. matters. To give an example of this, I briefly explore a selection of 15 personal improvement books and magazines mentioned in Table 1 of the Appendix. These texts are sold in the department stores called Sanborn’s, whose client typically belong to middle high or high classes, and in newspapers stands in middle class residential zones in Mexico City. I decided to examine these two types of documents because frequently are consumed by most of the participants of my study, and are sold in middle classes spaces in different parts of the city, which documents their meaning as sources of principal information for those social groups. These documents differ considerably in terms of their trajectories; from the authors to the publishing houses, and from the possible exporters to the kinds of readers. Some have been exclusively printed in Mexico (3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13), others have been published originally in other countries, whose cultural level is different (e.g. Spain, USA, and other countries of Latin America) to be sold without changes in Mexico (1, 2, 4, 8, 12). Others are special editions of international publications destined to
the Mexican market (14, 15), whereas one of them has been written and published in Mexico and sold in Mexico and the USA. The authors’ profiles, information is presented, are equally heterogeneous in terms of their national origins (for example, Spain, other countries of Latin America, Mexico, and the United States) which do not always coincide with the countries where their texts are published and distributed. For example, the magazine *Psicología Práctica* is published in Spain, imported to Mexico without changes (it means, without adaptations to the particularities of the Mexican Spanish) and contains contributions to authors from Spain, Colombia, and Argentina. The cover shows the costs for Spain, Portugal, Italy, Austria, UK, Morocco and Greece. Regarding their content, which I explain in a very way, these publications also differ in a very significant way. They contain ideological roots in currents such as the psychoanalysis, different forms of psychotherapy, catholic methodology, enterprises administration, popular genetics and sociology, besides oriental mysticism. In this sense, and given the complex trajectories, it does not seem possible to understand these publications and their content, based on the conceptual dicotomy of “traditional” and “modern”, or analize them in terms of the constitution of a supposed independent and exclusively “Mexican” culture. These publications and the meanings they transmit—which conform in a very important way the cultural environment of many middle class Mexicans in Mexico City—flow by global nets of ideas, economic interests, communication technologies, etc. (Castells, 2000). They are fundamentally hybrid since the ideas they contain are disassociated from their original “contexts”, and are reinterpreted in the act of disassociate and transplant them to other social contexts; for example, the magazine *Cosmopolitan* (March 17, 2005, pp.90ff.), distributed globally, presents to its Mexican readers an article apparently written by two American writers on the *Kama Sutra*, which originally comes from the south of Asia. In this sense, it is possible to talk about a contradictory plurality of notions about the gender relationships circulating in Mexico and publications as the ones listed in Table 1. On one hand, in a very superficial and general way, it seems possible to group the publications listed in two groups; the first group (1-4, 8-12, 14, 15) is characterized by presenting a highly individualist and voluntarist model of the social life, which prioritizes the individual decisions in the search of personal preferences, happiness, etc. That is manifested in somo of their titles, which put in a central place the self (*Yo, Eres, Por ti*) (*I, You are, For you*) and to the voluntarist self-realization (*Actitudes para triunfar, La conquista de la voluntad, Manual para triunfadores*) (*Attitudes to succeed,*
The conquest of will, Manual for winners). The gender relationships in this group are portrayed as the consequence of bargains and decision at an individual level, for example; having kids (four) depends entirely on the women’s free will. The second group (5-7, 13) is characterized by highlighting a model that conceptualizes the gender relationships in terms of fixed and socially determined social positions. For example, La conspiración feminista (The feminine conspiracy) (seven) is a quite disordered attempt of justifying the “natural” subordination of women under the male authority, and Ser mamá (Being a mom) (13) portray the women’s life completely from the private sphere; it contains sections such as “Woman and mother”, “The family”, “Fun” and “Health” (March, 2005). On the other hand, examining these publications in a more detailed way, this classification seems to be of a limited validity, since it does not portray thoroughly the heterogeneity of meanings within each group and text. The first group “individualist” publications, for example, contain very varied perspectives regarding the construction of viable couple relationships, from a reflexive discussion motivated therapeutically motivated of the complex implications of “decisions” such as maternity, to rigid exhorts to the repression of “negative emotions” and “resentments” to discipline the will in order to build long-lasting relationships (two). Likewise, in the second group, for example, despite their, seemingly patriarchal, aspect of women confined to their houses, Ser mama (13) has some noticeable individualist connotations, since it portrays maternity and the conjugal relation in terms of the feminine self-realization and not as obligations given by predetermined social positions. Then, even within this limited group of publications and in every one of them there is a complex mixture of ideas of divergent origin and implications. This publications potentially provide their readers with plural patterns and also contradictory of cultural meanings regarding the couple relationships. Regarding the matter of the use of these cultural patterns at an individual level, this implies important questions. For example, how and to what extent do readers incorporate these different meanings to their ideas and points of view about gender relationships repertoires? Given the variable character of the cultural meanings available sociably, how do individuals try to integrate them at the general level? How do they use them to formulate viable action strategies for their daily lifes? How and to what extent do they use them to give sense to their daily experiences? Besides, the described publications in this section are part of a very particular middle class social context, which in a way corresponds to the westerned “imaginary Mexico” that Bonfil Batalla (2003) characterizes. Then, which patterns of
cultural meanings about gender relationships are available in other sectors of the Mexican society? In which way do these patterns differ from the ones that are common among middle class Mexicans in Mexico City, as the one who participated in my study? These questions could offer interesting research lines for the social research in the future.

**Conclusion**

Throughout the article I have tried to expose some ideas on the new and potentially interesting forms to think about the development of the gender relationships in Mexico. In particular, it seems important in the current research stage on this subject, to recognize the meaning of the cultural factors and the ways in which these interact with the socioeconomic and demographic arrangements that have received so much attention from the social researchers so far. Given that now, fortunately, there is not a dominant theoretical paradigm in most parts of the social sciences; the previously exposed ideas cannot be more than a tentative suggestion for future debates. However, this does not decrease its potential meaning. Theoretical debates and empirical research, according to these lines of research or others alike, have generated in recent years important results in other regions of the world, and thus they could be equally fruitful for the study of the gender relationships in Mexico. Despite the fact that the established research lines have generated noticeable ideas, to complement them with other perspectives could improve even more our knowledge about how Mexicans have experienced their gender relationships in their daily life.
### TABLE 1
SOME PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT MAGAZINES AND BOOKS SOLD IN MEXICO CITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Num.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Trajectory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Suryavan Solar: Manual para triunfadores</td>
<td>Personal impr. book</td>
<td>Chilean author, Publisher in four Latin America countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Enrique Rojas: La conquista de la voluntad</td>
<td>Personal impr. book</td>
<td>Originally written and Publisher in Spain; reprinted in Mexico without changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Eric de la Parra and María del Carmen Madero: Actitudes para triunfar</td>
<td>Personal impr. book</td>
<td>Two Mexican authors with academia formation in the USA and Great Britain involved in international consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Diana L. Dell, M.D. and Suzan Erem: ¿Realmente quiero tener hijos?</td>
<td>Personal impr. book</td>
<td>Originally written and publisher in the United States; reprinted in Mexico without changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Victor Caballero: Manual del varón infiel</td>
<td>Personal impr. book</td>
<td>Written by a Mexican author, sold in Mexico and in the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez: Juventud en éxtasis</td>
<td>Personal impr. book</td>
<td>Written and publisher in Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lorenzo Firenze: La conspiración feminista</td>
<td>Personal impr. book</td>
<td>Written and publisher in Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num.</td>
<td>Title</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mejora tu vida en pareja</td>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>Published in Spain and imported to Mexico without changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Veintitántos</td>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>Written and published in Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yo</td>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>Written and published in Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Eres</td>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>Written and published in Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Psicología práctica</td>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>Written by Spanish and Latin American authors; published in Spain authors, published in Spain and imported to Mexico without changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Ser mamá</td>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>Written and published in Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Cosmopolitan</td>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>Mexican edition of an internationally published magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Por ti</td>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>Mexican edition of an internationally published magazine</td>
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Reflections on cultural constructions of gender relationships in Mexico

D. Nehring

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