When Men Leave Al Otro Lado (To the Other Side of the Border): Voices of Mexican Women

Linda Herrera Ortiz

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/1206

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Knowledge Repository @ IUP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (All) by an authorized administrator of Knowledge Repository @ IUP. For more information, please contact sara.parme@iup.edu.
WHEN MEN LEAVE AL OTRO LADO (TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BORDER):

VOICES OF MEXICAN WOMEN

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Linda Herrera Ortiz

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

May 2014
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of Criminology

We hereby approve the thesis of

Linda Herrera Ortiz

Candidate for the degree of Master of Arts

______________________
Timothy Austin, Ph.D.
Professor of Criminology, Chair

______________________
Bitna Kim, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Criminology

______________________
Victor Q. Garcia, Ph.D.
University Professor of Anthropology

ACCEPTED

______________________
Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research
This thesis examines, using the ethnographic method, the problems that Mexican women encounter as they struggle to adapt to life when their husbands come and go—spending only a few weeks out of the year at home, while most of the time is spent working en el otro lado (“on the other side”) of the border. As a result, towns in México are left with an overwhelming number of women, who are a vital part of the migration phenomena. Little systematic research appears to have addressed the stress associated with this issue, making this MA thesis unique from the literature on immigration and associated problems. The majority of the existing research focuses on the men and migrating families already settled in the U.S. overlooking the other side of the problem: women who stay behind. This thesis conveys the personal voices of this important but often-neglected segment of the population.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research project was partially funded by a grant awarded to the researcher by Indiana University’s School of Graduate Studies and Research.

A las mujeres que participaron en este estudio quienes son mucho más fuerte de lo que se imaginan.

Porque de allí soy.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>THE PROBLEM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theoretical Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH SETTING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Collection Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-structured Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strengths and Limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human Subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>FINDINGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transnational and Circular Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>El Migrante and the Pressures of Looking for a Suitable Husband: What are the Preferences of Mexican Women Regarding the Men Who Leave and Those That Stay?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absent Husbands: How Do Mexican Women Adapt to a Living Situation in Which Their Men are Absent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absent Fathers: How Does Having a Long Distance Marriage Affect the Family Dynamics?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Older and Younger Generations: How Do Young Mexican Women View This “Unusual” Living Situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hopes to Travel Abroad: How Do Mexican Women Believe Things Will Change Once They Can Also Migrate to the United States to be With Their Men?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independence and Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Application of Merton’s Modes of Adaptations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

The presence of Mexican workers in the United States began with the railroad construction during the 1800s (Katz, Stern, & Fader, 2007). Ever since, Mexican citizens cross over to the United States in search of employment opportunities to support their families back in México. These men typically perform manual labor in the agriculture industry or work in factories throughout the United States. Many stay in the United States for long periods of time and only go back to see their families when work becomes scarce, as in the case of farm workers, or when vacation leave is offered. Year after year immigrants engage in this circular movement between two locations as more and more migrants have established transnational ties to more than one country, distorting the harmony of societal and physical space. Consequently, women are forced to endure the departures of their husbands and sons while they stay behind.

This thesis examines problems that Mexican women encounter as they struggle to adapt to life where their husbands, boyfriends, and sons come and go—spending only a few weeks out of the year while most of the time is spent working al otro lado (“on the other side”) of the border. Narratives were collected from a sample of 35 Mexican women who share opinions about husbands or others who migrate back and forth from México to the United States.

Also, personal views of single young Mexican women were scrutinized to examine their preferences either for men who migrate or those that do not, and the reasons for their preferences. Examination of the preferences in men of single
Mexican women in rural areas is of much importance as these preferences shape the community and family dynamics.

This research explores women’s perceptions regarding how they feel about, and adapt to, such unusual living situations where men are frequently away from home for long periods. The researcher also probed to how these women believe things would change once they can also migrate to the U.S.A. to be with their men folk.

As the Hispanic population in the United States continues to grow, especially of those migrating from México, better understanding of their struggles becomes increasingly important. As a result of the large number of men who continue to head north, small towns in México are left with an overwhelming number of women. Little systematic research appears to have addressed the stress associated with this issue, which makes this study unique from the literature on immigration and associated problems. The majority of the existing research focuses on the men and migrating families already settled in the United States overlooking the other side of the problem: those women who stay behind. This thesis conveys the personal voices of this often-neglected segment of the population.

**Research Questions**

This thesis addresses five research questions.

1. *What are the preferences of Mexican women regarding the men who leave and those that stay?*

2. *How do Mexican women adapt to a living situation in which their men are absent?*
3. How does having a long distance marriage affect the family dynamics?

4. How do young Mexican women view this “unusual” living situation?

5. How do Mexican women believe things will change once they can also migrate to the United States to be with their men?

First, what are the preferences of Mexican women regarding the men who leave and those that stay? Here, the researcher is asking, do Mexican women prefer a Mexican male that migrates to the United States over one that choses not to migrate? What are the factors that dictate whether to choose one over the other? Is the main reason for choosing a male who migrates because he may be better able to financially care for a family? If this is true, do women find themselves in a dilemma whereby they choose a future husband based on whether that male migrates over more traditional reasons for marriage (i.e., romantic love, etc.). How does the possession of legal documentation enter into the picture? In what ways might women opt to marry a Mexican man with a United States citizenship, or a green card holder, in hopes that someday their husbands could help them gain documentation, and soon travel to the “land of opportunity”?

Second, how do Mexican women adapt to a living situation where their men are absent? Here, the researcher is concerned with investigating the ways that Mexican women adjust to what has become a long distance marriage. What happens to the women when their husbands leave? Do they live alone or do they move in with their in-laws? Is having a husband hundreds of miles away normal? That is, is it so common in that particular society that women have lost the idea of a “normal”
living situation between a husband and wife? Or, is there a series of steps or stages that women go through to adjust to this living situation? Do these women ever become accustomed to this living situation? Or, is it a constant work in progress? If they have never had a “customary” living situation with their husband, how will they miss something that they have never experienced?

Third, how does living in a long distance marriage affect the family dynamics? Here, the researcher explores the ways that long distance marriage, and the absence of husbands and fathers, affect the family and community. How might this affect the Mexican traditional and conservative concept of family? What are the challenges that Mexican mothers endure when raising children by themselves? How are the children affected by not having a father present throughout their childhood? How might this affect a son compared to a daughter? Generally, how is the concept of the Mexican family changing?

Forth, how do young Mexican women view this “unusual” living situation? Here the researcher is interested in examining the views of the younger generations of Mexican women. How do the views of the older and younger generation of Mexican women differ? How are they similar? How has life in a household where fathers are absent shaped their views on family? Do they also want a long distance marriage like their mothers and grandmothers had? In what ways might education play a role? Does the younger generation of Mexican women have multiple choices, or do they still feel compelled to follow traditions of the older generation?

Finally, how do Mexican women believe things will change once they can also migrate to the United States to be with their men? Here, the researcher is interested
in examining if Mexican women have hopes of beginning a new life in the United States with their husbands, and if they feel that such migration will help or hurt their family. Also, compared to the younger generations, how might older generations of Mexicans feel about leaving their homeland for a different life? Do Mexican women want to travel North and leave everything behind because they believe life will be better, or are they only willing to migrate because they want to keep their families together?

**Definition of Terms**

Definitions of terms given in the following section pertain to the Spanish terms and concepts that will be used throughout this thesis. Some are easily translated into English, but have no direct translation and require a brief explanation in order for readers to understand its meaning and importance in Mexican society.

1. *Arreglar*: This word means to fix or arrange, but in the context of this topic Mexican citizens express this word to mean that they or someone else is going through the process of obtaining legal residency in the United States.


4. *Chismosa*: Literally means gossip. This word is used to label a woman who knows the latest gossip of the town.

5. *Cerro*: Hill.

6. *Comadre*: There is no word in the English dictionary to translate this word. *Comadre* is a label for certain women who have been elected or chosen by
other women as to be part of their family. Usually after this woman helps out in some way, like being a godmother to another woman’s child. This word can be seen as a polite and loving way to refer to a dear friend and is also associated with gossip.

7. *Dejada*: A woman who has been abandoned by her husband.


9. *Deposito*: A woman who has “left” with her boyfriend but returns to her home or a family members home for a specific period of time until a proper wedding is held.

10. *Descreditada*: Discredited. Use to refer to a women who has been with men before marriage.

11. *El norte*: Literally translates to “north.” This word also expresses a reference to the United States. *El norte* is used by Mexicans more often than “*Los Estados Unidos*” (The United States).

12. *Emmigration*: Refers to people leaving a country for a different country.

13. *Fracasar*: To fail. This term is widely used to describe a women who’s marriage did not work out.

14. *Immigrate*: To immigrate means that someone has moved to a new country.

15. *Immigration*: Refers to people coming into a country.


17. *Madrina*: Godmother. It is very common for small town people in México to have a handful of *madrinas* or godmothers that help parents with the raising
of children. For the children having a madrina is like having another
grandmother: someone who spoils you with candy and gives you money.

18. Manda: A prayer made to a saint for divine intervention or a miracle in which
the person making the prayer promises to make sacrifice in return for help,
such as resolving a longstanding dispute or making a pilgrimage to shrine.
Mandas are made by mothers and wives whose sons or husbands migrate to
the United States.

19. Malinche: A person who prefers foreign goods over those of your country of
origin.

20. Migration: A noun that is used to describe the movement of people between
countries; the umbrella term under which both immigration and emigration
fall.

21. Migrant: A person that migrates or moves between countries.


23. Mujer del hogar: A woman of the home.

24. Nixtamal: Corn kernels ready to be processed into masa “dough”.


26. Novelas: Soap operas

27. Novena: A series of prayers that are said for nine straight days in the
evenings, usually as a prayer for divine intervention but sometimes as a
prayer of thanksgiving. The nine days recall or symbolize the nine days that
the Apostles and the Blessed Virgin Mary spent in prayer between Ascension
Thursday and Pentecost Sunday.


30. Paisano: Compatriot.

31. P'al otro lado: Literally means “to the other side.” This expression is used by Mexican citizens to refer to the United States, or when talking about someone crossing over to the United States.

32. Papeles: Literally means “papers.” This word means legal documentation or green card.

33. Pedida: a woman who is engaged.

34. Rebezo: Shawl.

35. Robada: to be stolen or taken. A woman who left with her boyfriend without any proper marriage proposal.

36. Rancho: Small rural village.

37. Se fue: “she left.” Describes a woman who willingly “left” with her boyfriend without parent consent or proper marriage proposal.

38. Transmigration: Circular migration. Movement by a person or group from one place or country to another.

39. Transnational migration: the process by which immigrants form and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.

40. Urbano: Bus.

41. Valerse por sí misma: Make it on your own.

42. Verguenza: Shame.
Chapter Two will provide a review of relevant literature that pertains to the research problem and questions. It will also discuss several theoretical perspectives in criminology that will predictably help guide the study.
CHAPTER 2
RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORY

Little is known about how women endure life in Mexico when their menfolk travel across the border into the United States, sometimes for long periods of time. As prevalent as immigration is today, with national leaders placing it high on their agenda, most that is known regarding immigration is demographic and quantitative and focused on migrating males. Vasquez, (2011) sums up the issue perfectly:

Several studies address the Mexican migratory phenomenon and the positive and negative impact it has on economic development. However, few studies address those who stay behind and the crucial role they play in their communities, particularly the role of women and children, who heavily bear the cost of migration. (p. 684)

In the book *Gender, Globalization, and Democratization*, anthropologist Laura Gonzalez provides a vivid picture of how the study of labor migration from the state of Guanajuato, México to the U.S., allows us to see globalization in the form of imported mechanized agricultural methods. As well, we can see the form of demand for labor in the U.S., and how it has consequently disturbed traditional gender roles both in México and the United States (Gonzalez, 2001). Gonzales (2001) depicts the pattern of Mexican international migration by an analogous description of a blossoming plant with its roots in Guanajuato, México and its stems and flowers extending through the United States:

Like small seedlings in a nursery, migrants are born and nurtured in Guanajuato. They then move north forming small and large enclaves in all the
states of the United States...ensuring an abundant source of young, healthy, hard-working, and docile workers. (p. 77)

As a result, a large number of men head north while small towns in México are left with an overwhelming number of women. These women instantly become single mothers, and become accustomed to an “abnormal,” yet ultimately common lifestyle of the average Mexican woman.

Women that have been left behind in México can be traced to the early 1900’s with the Bracero program, one of the first mutual labor contracts between México and the United States (Gordillo, 2010). A large number of Mexican men left their homeland to work on railroads and agricultural fields in the United States leaving their wives alone to fend for themselves and their children. To this day, the most common migrants working in the United States continue to be young rural Mexican men (Passel, 2005 as stated in Vasquez, 2011). There is no foreseeable end to the migrating phenomenon of the Mexican man.

The motives that prompt Mexican men to come to the United States are almost exclusively economic. He does not come to admire the American language or culture he comes for one reason only: work. As long as the United States continuous to provide jobs for immigrants, regardless of pay or stigma, if that job provides for an entire family back home, Mexican men will continue to cross over to the United States even if that means risking their life doing so. According to the Center for Immigration Studies analysis of the 2010 American Community Survey public-use file, over the last decade, new immigration, both documented and undocumented, plus births to immigrants, increased the United States population by 22.5 million.
These numbers equal to 80 percent of the total U.S. population growth (Camarota, 2012). In the last decade, “México was by far the top emigrating country” (Camarota, 2012, p. 16). More than four million Mexicans arrived to the United States between 2000 and 2010 (Camarota, 2012). As the Hispanic population in the United States continues to grow, especially of those migrating from Mexico, better understanding of their struggles becomes critically important. The lack of jobs and high poverty wages in México lead Mexican citizens to journey to their neighboring country in pursuit of employment in order to support their families.

Mexican men cross over to the United States multiple times a year (depending on legal status) and send money back to their families. Through in-depth interviews of 24 women from one community in México, Snyder, Diaz-Perez, Acevedo, & Natera (1996) found that migration of the husband is “unwanted yet an economic necessity” (p. 392). During the time that the men are in México, their wives help with harvesting, take care of domestic duties and care for the children (Alysa & Massay, 2004). Often, as stated by Gonzalez (2001) once the men head out, the women do not live alone; they live with their in-laws or with their own parents and care for their children. When men depart, women are then responsible for the land, children, cattle, and the elderly (Gonzalez, 2001). Unexpectedly, this can empower and lead women to become politically active (Vasquez, 2011). Nonetheless, women become overworked (Gonzalez, 2001).

Snyder (1993) conducted tests to measure the psychological health of wives that were left behind. These tests found increased stress for women as they adopted several roles in the absence of their husband, and had a hard time
managing new roles in their family and community. Similarly, Nance (2004) found increased rates of depression related to issues of loss of their partner to emigration, adultery or alcohol abuse, when analyzing the mental health of indigenous, Mazahau women in México.

Mexican women, especially those living in rural communities, face new challenges that require their increased involvement in all phases of native life. The traditional role of the “housewife” is no longer enough (Vasquez, 2011). In a relevant study, Alysa and Massay (2004) assessed the degree to which husband migration to the United States encouraged or failed to encourage labor market activity for wives who were left behind in México. They found that spousal migration did not escalated the chances of work force involvement by the wife in rural areas, but there was a small effect noted on the probability for wives in inner-city areas to be “pushed” into paid labor markets (Alysa & Massay, 2004). The authors explain that these findings imply that whereas women in inner-city regions are more prone to work due to better opportunities provided by urban communities and weaker traditional role expectations, women in “job-starved” and more gender obstructive rural areas are at greater danger if the money that is sent to them from their migrant husband becomes insufficient or discontinues (Alysa & Massay, 2004).

In order to accomplish sustainable development, as suggested by Vasquez (2011), it is crucial that women in migrant communities become empowered, since it is them, the women, who can head the way in order to boost progression in these specific regions. Gonzales (2001) argues, however, that an increasing number of women are traveling North to work and to be with their husbands. As a
consequence, elementary schools in México have fewer children every year because complete families are leaving for the United States. In high schools, girls outnumber boys because so many teenage males migrate north just like their fathers and grandfathers before them.

Various insightful accounts of Mexican women whose children express a desire to migrate north are shown by McCarty and Altemose (2010) in their research on the effect that undocumented immigration to the United States has on women left behind in México. McCarty and Altemose (2010) explain that children as young as thirteen years old tell their mothers they want to cross over to the United States to help provide for the family. Youths who have migrated pressure these young men and reassure them that life is better in the United States because “you earn more” (McCarty & Altemose, 2010). However, McCarty and Altemose (2010) found that most of the women who participated in their study are taking the first steps to change their lives as they are beginning to make a better living by organizing themselves into small production groups and cooperatives.

In these small towns, employment outside the home for women can be seen as a technique that generates women’s empowerment and development (Vasquez, 2011). According to Vasquez (2011), these women have realized that if they structure themselves economically and work together in the absence of their husbands, they will have better gains as a whole, but most importantly, that this will keep their children from crossing over to the United States. McCarty and Altemose (2010) conclude by stating that considering that México has an extensive history of gender inequality, their findings indicate that, “women seem to be in the process of
detaching themselves from the institutional roles as traditionally defined for women in México” (p. 297). Adding that as they work together and take accountability for the wellbeing of their families, they gain independence that could generate a pattern shift among female members of the population (McCarty & Altemose, 2010).

As the research suggests, rural Mexican women today perform greater roles as the primary providers and caretakers, and in taking control of the finances. In doing so, an increase “feminizing effect” is occurring for these new heads of the household in these communities (Vasquez, 2011). From a global restructuring standpoint, a study conducted in Guanajuato, México examined the way that rural Mexican women who stay behind are connected to the changes triggered by the migration north, and how it has affected their lives (Galvan, 2008). Because Mexican rural towns have become transnational communities as a consequence of migration to the United States, new ways of thinking are carried back and imbedded in women by returning husbands. However, many times women prevent certain ideas from subverting their family’s values and beliefs (Galvan, 2008).

Galvan (2008) categorized how the structure of a trans-migrant community changes as community members come and go. In the first group that Galvan called “accommodation,” she explains that due to the absence of their spouses, rural Mexican women endure more obligations at home as well as in their communities. These responsibilities are so excessive that they require much energy and time. Moreover, most of the women feel pressure inflicted on them by their distant husbands, because despite the fact that the women replace their spouses as the head of the family, the women nevertheless still afford husbands a certain amount of
authority (Gordillo, 2010). Additionally, Gordillo (2010) states that these women also feel pressured from the community to complete all of their chores without any reproach, not to mention the nonexistence of recognition for their hard work.

“Contestation” is Galvan’s second category community change. Here, she notes how Mexican women learn to adjust to their situation and responsibilities as a “left behind wife.” Rural Mexican women understand and accept that migration of their men results in economic benefits, but at the same time it brings negative consequences such as the disintegration and breakdown of the family.

The last of Galvan’s categories is “transcendence.” Here, Galvan discusses the ways that Mexican women surpass community beliefs and conditions. While women have to take on the roles of their absent husbands, such as that of the head of the household, the community appears indisposed to accept such changes in traditional roles of women, increasing the stress felt by the women. This is important because although the absence of men empowers women and gives them independence, the community, in return, criticizes them. Often, it is other women who disapprove of them for being active in the community and not in the household (Galvan, 2008).

As the significant, yet limited, research on rural Mexican women has revealed, the male-female separation resulting from male transnational migration has led to a blurring of gender roles.

**Theoretical Overview**

Although this rather exploratory study is not launched with an explicit attempt to test social science theory, it is anticipated that the works of Merton
(1949) and Agnew (2001) pertaining to how persons adapt to stress, will help frame the research. The researcher created a definition of stress by using key characteristics of the standard explanations of Merton and Agnew. These were augmented by meanings of stress specific to the research topic. Special attention was placed on how Mexican women living in the absence of the men in their lives adapt to subsequent stress.

Merton (1949) argues that society strongly stresses certain goals and the legitimate means to reach those goals. The emphasis of these goals causes social norms to breakdown as well as a situation in which those norms no longer control the activity of the members of society, producing a split between goals and means as a consequence of society's structure (Williams & McShane, 2010). Those who belong to the lower social class are then at a disadvantage because the approved means to reach those goals are not accessible to them. These individuals are then confronted with the strain of not being able to achieve their goals with their restricted prospects (Williams & McShane, 2010).

Merton (1949) identifies the following five ways or modes of adapting to strain. Conformity: One accepts the way things are and goes on to strive for success within the classified established means available. Innovation: Commitment to success goals are maintained but benefit is taken over unlawful means to achieve them. Ritualism: Rejection of the goals and focus is shifted to the means. Giving up the struggle to get ahead and focusing on keeping whatever has been already achieved. Retreatism: Becoming a societal dropout, rejecting both the goals and the
effort to achieve them. Example: Alcoholics. Rebellion: Substitution of new goals and means for the original ones.

Building upon Merton’s work, Robert Agnew’s general strain theory (GST) states that negative relationships with others causes strain in people’s lives (Agnew, 2001). Additionally GST considers two other bases of strain: when others remove or threaten to remove positively valued stimuli that one holds, and when others present or threaten to introduce a person with negatively valued stimuli (Barlow & Kauzlarich, 2010). Agnew (2001) theorizes that negative occurrences that are seen as extremely unfair and threatening are more probable to elicit abnormal behaviors, suggesting that it is those who do not manage well with circumstances are more prone to commit crime or delinquent acts due to strain. Furthermore, Agnew (2001) claims that personal characteristics, character, social learning and bonding variables assist to establish whether a person’s adaptation to strain is criminal or not.

By combining the themes of Merton and Agnew, this study will explore how a sample of Mexican women adapts to stress resulting from the absence of men.

Chapter three will discuss methodology and research setting for this thesis.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH SETTING

This chapter incorporates a number of sub-themes. These include the research setting, research questions, the sample, and data collection procedures. Also, addressed are the analysis plan, strengths and weaknesses, and a brief discussion on the protection of human subjects.

Research Setting

This ethnographic research was conducted in and around the rural Mexican village of La Lomita on the outskirts of the city of Moroléon. Moroléon is in the Los Valles del Sur region in the state of Guanajuato situated in the heart of México between the arid north of the country and the more tropical south (See Appendix C). Tourists visit Guanajuato for its colonial architecture and its role in Mexico’s history, considered the birthplace of the country’s independence. Moroléon, near the research site of La Lomita, is a major garment region and is well known for its colorful gardens in the center of the city along with its many street vendors.

La Lomita, a village of about 500 people is the birthplace of the researcher and the place where she spent her youthful years. Consequently, it provides immediate access to the small population of residents who are well aware of the struggle of life in the near absence of menfolk who have crossed the border to the United States.

Research Questions

1. What are the preferences of Mexican women regarding the men who leave and those that stay?
2. How do Mexican women adapt to a living situation where their men are absent?

3. How does having a long distance marriage affect the family dynamics?

4. How do young Mexican women view this “unusual” living situation?

5. How do Mexican women believe things will change once they can also migrate to the United States to be with their men?

Sample

As a native Mexican and prior citizen of La Lomita, and being fluent in Spanish, the researcher holds a unique position as researcher. The researcher lived in this small community for the first thirteen years of her life before immigrating to the United States. The advantage of being an insider is of great benefit to the researcher as she already has an understanding of not only the culture but also has experienced living in a transnational community.

A snowball or network data-gathering procedure was used resulting in a purposive sample of 35 Mexican women. A snowball sample, according to Maxfield and Babbie (2011) is a type of nonprobability sampling that starts with the identification of one, or a small number of research subjects, and then these existing study subjects suggest or enlist potential partakers from their contacts. Consequently the sample group seems to grow like a rolling snowball. With the assistance of known social contacts in La Lomita and the region, the researcher experienced no difficulty locating persons for initial interview.

Research subjects were sought according to their characteristics needed for effective response to the research questions. These characteristics included: currently living in La Lomita and having a husband or boyfriend who migrates to the
U.S. All research subjects were contacted in person by the researcher. The sample included eighteen married women, sixteen single women, and one abandoned woman.

**Data Collection Procedures**

This research integrates four techniques of data collection. These include, participant observation, direct observation, listening, and obtained answers to prearrange, open-ended questions.

**Participant Observation**

The investigator resided with her maternal grandmother for a period of three months in the same setting where the research subjects reside, and experienced first-hand the living environment of the sample of Mexican women. This included participating in all household chores that most of the women engage in like washing clothes by hand in a *lavadero*, going to *el cerro* to pick *nopalitos* and taking the long walk to *el ojo de agua* for clean water. This not only allowed the researcher to experience what life was for these women but also allowed the researcher to earn respect in the community. In addition, the researcher participated in routine village/town activities, especially those in which women were involved. For example, the researcher attended many church related events including a number of pilgrimages where many of the participants made *mandas*. Moreover, the researcher also participated in *novenas*, mass and Bible study sessions. As well as school events, town meetings and *juntas* where the women took many of the leadership roles usually taken by men. Such full participation allowed
the researcher to maintain on-going, informal discussion with women during their daily round of life.

**Direct Observation**

In addition to being a participant observer, the researcher was also engaged in direct observation. There were moments where the researcher found herself in social events and the like where direct observation took place without becoming part of what was being observed. As noted by Maxfield and Babbie (2011): “The subjects of research might not even realize they are being studied because of the researcher’s unobtrusiveness” (p. 299). The researcher used direct observation in many occasions, for example while riding el urbano to the city, where not only interesting conversations took place but where you can easily see how the women interact with each other. Many of La Lomita’s issues were discussed during the forty-minute bus trip to Moroléon like when the phone cables were stolen for instance. Also, because el urbano also picks up people from the neighboring villages on its way to town el urbano was the perfect place to discuss and even organize intercommunity activities like religious pilgrimages with members of other villages. Thus it became the perfect setting to conduct direct observation.

**Listening**

Listening can be a very powerful skill. A considerable amount of information can be obtained from simply listening and paying attention to the speaker. Although conversations or comments that are overheard do not originate from direct questions by the investigator, these can be very valuable to the overall understanding of the true feelings and opinions of the research subjects and
community members. Referred, by anthropologists Strickland and Schleslinger (1969) as “lurking” behavior. It is important to note that by listening the researcher refers to the attention given to conversations in which those conversing are aware of the presence of the investigator and not eavesdropping into private conversations. Relevant and useful information was obtained from conversations overheard by the researcher while engaged in observation during community events as well as during everyday life in the research site. For example, listening became appropriate and highly important when the researcher found herself in places of worship and school and community meetings where the researcher’s presence was granted but no interaction was needed. Thus, listening served as an unobtrusive means to gain useful data by the simple act of being present and attentive and can prove particularly useful in supplementing data collected through more obtrusive interview techniques.

**Semi-structured Interviews**

Asking the same pre-determined questions to all the women in the sample was the most direct way to gain responses to the research questions. The interviews were conducted in a personal, face-to-face, manner and in a setting comfortable for the respondent (i.e. home, restaurant, Public Park, etc.). This type of questioning tends to be less structured than found in survey questionnaires, more closely aligned with a casual conversation in a relaxed atmosphere.

The researcher followed the simple yet significant rules of asking questions given by Angrosino (2008). These include, asking questions one at a time to avoid confusing the interviewee, asking questions that will allow the interviewee to
elaborate and avoiding yes or no questions, and acting as a facilitator to allow the interviewee to go off in the direction of her choice. Such open-ended or semi-structured questions avoids putting words in the interviewee’s mouth and permits the respondent to go off in a direction not expected by the researcher.

Questions asked included the following:

1. What is it like to have your husband so far away for long periods of time?
2. How do you cope with having added responsibilities due to the absence of your husband?
3. What is your opinion about men migrating to the United States?
4. With your husband so far away, what difficulties do you experience in raising the children?
5. Describe the relationship between your husband and the children?
6. Talk a little about what it is like when your husband returns?
7. Do you have any desires of migrating to the United States? How do you think that will change your life?
8. What is your opinion regarding the life experienced by your mother, aunts, cousins or women in your community who have husbands across the border?
9. In what ways would you say that a man who migrates north is more preferable than one that doesn’t? Or, how might you say a man who does not cross the border may be preferable?
10. Do you have any plans or hopes for the future regarding marriage? With so many men heading north, how might this affect finding dating partners, or even husbands?
11. Do you think that young women in La Lomita are pressured into getting finding a suitable husband and getting married?

12. Tell me how was it like to grow up with a faraway father? How would you describe the relationship between your mother and father? You and your father?

The researcher planned to voice-record formal interviews to allow for accurate, verbatim information as well as to avoid memory related problems. However, many participants did not feel comfortable being voice recorded. The researcher thus also relied on handwritten notes during and after conversations with each participant. Comprehensive field notes were rigorously maintained on a daily basis. These field notes report results of the different forms of data collected, witnessed, or experienced by the researcher.

**Analysis Plan**

Because interviews and conversations will be in Spanish, most of the raw data was transcribed into the English by the researcher. When permissible, voice recording were used during scheduled interviews, which were later transcribed into writing and translated. Verbatim accounts were sought from respondents. On a continuing basis during the fieldwork, the researcher scrutinized completed field notes using a “line by line” analysis and search for themes and patterns of themes from the raw interview data, field diaries, and notes from archival evidence. The researcher meticulously searched for themes that allowed for clear response to the research questions. Effort was made to arrange the terms, concepts, and themes into table format to illustrate patterns and any relationship to theory. Case studies
were accumulated from the personal accounts of interviewees that illustrate how women are adapting to life without their menfolk.

**Strengths and Limitations**

The most apparent strength of this study is the researcher herself. Not only is the researcher a native Mexican fluent in the Spanish language, but also she was reared in the same town where the fieldwork took place. Because the researcher has lived in a transnational community, and has experience as an immigrant to the United States, she is aware of the issues and importance of the research problem. Because this thesis invokes insights that can be personal and not easily obtained by outsiders or strangers to the community, the investigator holds an advantage. As a *paisana* and native to the area, she will not experience issues of outsiders who must work to earn rapport with local citizens.

Having said this, it is also critically important to note that the researcher constantly worked to avoid allowing any personal bias into her observations or discussions with locals. It could be argued that because the researcher has some familiarity or opinions of the topic of this thesis, prejudiced findings could result. Although a good point, this was not the case since the investigator was not expecting or looking for any specific results. The researcher was simply concerned and highly curious about this thought-provoking phenomenon that is occurring in regards to women and only hoped to shed some light on this aspect of the immigration issue.

Ethnography or field research as a type of qualitative inquiry is an efficient method for studying the life and activities of a group of people. A significant strength of comprehensive and subjective data is that validity is alleged to be high.
This is due to the comprehensive perspective that field research gives the researcher by “going directly to the phenomenon under study and observing it as completely as possible to develop a deeper and fuller understanding of it” (Maxfield and Babbie, 2011, pg. 296). In addition, field research allows the investigator to identify subtle differences in meaning, expression, behavior, and setting those researchers using other methods may miss.

Issues of reliability however are raised with the data collection procedures associated with this type of research. Interpretations of qualitative procedures, such as participant observation, are frequently composed by the observer or researcher in order to fit the empirical data at hand (Maxfield and Babbie, 2011). Because the fieldworker draws conclusions as a single individual, the question is if another researcher will reach the same conclusions. Reliability is then questioned and must be noted as a potential limitation. However, the findings of this research are consistent to those found by other researchers, in the existing literature related to this topic, in rural villages in México just like La Lomita. Thus, there is an important degree of reliability with the findings of this research.

A potential limitation that is present with this research is that of the respondents’ awareness of being studied. Such reactivity may lead some respondents to act unnaturally or say things they believe the researcher wants to hear. In order to minimize this limitation, the researcher conducted several interviews with each subject to assure rapport. Drawing upon multiple procedures of data collection have assured accuracy. Results produced by field research cannot be generalized as strongly as other types of research; consequently generalizability
becomes a limitation in this research (Maxfield and Babbie, 2011). The findings will be limited to the research setting, but will extend the literature on this important subject area. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that the research setting resembles many of the surrounding villages not only geographically but also when looking at the social conditions as they share a transnational environment. Consequently, it would be highly expected that neighboring villages similar to La Lomita would produce similar results. Furthermore, the findings of this research are consistent to those found by other researchers, in the existing literature related to this topic, in research settings like La Lomita.

**Human Subjects**

According to Maxfield and Babbie (2011) any study in which human subjects are included needs to minimize harm to participants as well as researchers. Moreover, such study must use participation that is completely voluntary, safeguard privacy by providing confidentiality or anonymity, reduce deception, and attain informed consent as mandated by the Institutional Review Board (Maxfield & Babbie, 2011).

First and foremost the investigator prepared a human subjects protocol and obtained IRB approval. After IRB approval was granted the investigator was completely honest with participants and made certain that the participants understood the nature of the research to take place, its importance, and what will be asked of them. The researcher clarified that participation was voluntary and that responses would be entirely anonymous. No names or identifiers were used in this thesis, nor was any information shared that will identify participants with anyone.
Pseudonyms were used for all individuals who participated in this study and the name of the research site as well as neighboring villages were changed to further protect the anonymity and integrity of all human subjects.

The risk of harm to subjects in this study was minimal as participation was entirely voluntary. Because of the voluntary nature of the research, respondent understood that they had the right to withdraw at any point and choose not to continue with the research without facing any consequences or reproach for doing so. Furthermore, all participants understood and signed consent forms (See Appendix) written in Spanish, where they were informed about the study, the voluntary nature of participation and anonymity.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The frequent tales of migration and struggle by many of La Lomita’s residents inspired me to examine the perceptions of the women of this rural community. I focus on the strain, struggles, adaptation, and changes of wives who stay in México while their husbands are working in the United States. The migration of my own family from La Lomita to our permanent settlement in the United States is what primarily let me to contemplate the impacts that this phenomena had on the lives of women in this particular community.

After profound analysis of their struggles and stresses, as well as the emotional conditions produced by existing transnational interactions, it was apparent that not only the women had almost fully adapted to the absence of their husbands but also that their living conditions and the sociopolitical setting of this rural community pointed to a strong transmigrant setting, where women deal with the pros and shortcomings of being women who stays behind.

This study is grounded as an ethnographic study, composed of three months of living, contributing, and logging the day-to-day activities and community work of thirty-five campesinas throughout the summer months of the year 2012. After almost seven years since my last visit to the research site, I entered the community hopeful that my long absence would not add restrictions on my anticipated research. Stepping once again in the small village and venturing down the long strip of colorful houses made me feel as if I had never left. A warm welcome granted me community approval early on and allowed the research process to take place soon
after my arrival. Almost immediately it became clear that the impact that migration had on the women pointed to much larger issues than just the effects that it caused to the migrating husband and left behind wife.

La Lomita is a small rural village nestled in the outskirts of Moroléon, Guanajuato. Other small ranchos surround La Lomita. The research setting reflects many peasant villages throughout México, which have customarily survived from the land. With the exclusion of three participants all of the women interviewed resided in the research site for the entire duration of this investigation. Nevertheless, all of the women interviewed were either natives of La Lomita or made the research site their permanent home after marriage.

Like most residents of La Lomita, these women were directly affected by the migration of their husbands and males in their families. Undeniably, as stated by Galvan (2008), “no single factor in the last three decades has affected has these communities more than the constant exodus and movement of its members” (p. 524). Guanajuato is a leading sender of emigrants to the United States and because its men compromise a bigger number of those traveling back and forth (Galvan, 2008), both young and old are away through most of the year. This persistent transmigration significantly affects the women who stayed behind. What I observed then was many of the women’s reactions, perceptions, and changes to the transmigration phenomena.

**Transnational and Circular Migration**

Emigration is never an individual event. Its effect is extensive, distressing more than the emigrating individual. Many migrants remain in the United States for
long periods of time, up to five years in some cases, and only return to see their families when work becomes scarce, as with seasonal farm workers. Not only do the men undergo an excessive amount of stress while struggling to adapt to the life of a migrant to the United States, but also the periodic and sometimes sporadic movement across the border similarly causes anxiety on the families back in México. Moreover, the irregular movement between the two countries has inevitably altered the concept of what the traditional Mexican family once was.

A significant movement of circular migration between México and the United States has customarily defined Mexican migration (Mendoza, 2008). As explained by Mendoza (2008), “migrant workers do not always want to settle in destination countries” (p. 204). Subsequently, migrants travel with the intention of returning to their country of birth, thus, constructing a circular migration or repeated return. Labor migration is not new to La Lomita. Its male residents have been engaging in such practice for at least four generations. Most of those who head to el Norte settle in the northeastern states of the United States where many are employed in factory and agricultural work. The cause of this circular migration, as explicated by Mendoza (2009), include the migrants’ inclination for their home country, a shortage of employment opportunities in their country of origin and the goal of transferring money to their families who stay in home countries. The length of the trip of emigrants generally relies on financial reasons (Mendoza, 2008). Furthermore, legal status is another determinant factor. Those with no legal documentation visit their families back in México less frequently than those who have papeles.
As an outcome of the flow of husbands to and from the United States novel insights, money as well as information is presented that modify the positions and views of women that stay behind (Galvan, 2008). Women have learned how to adjust to their transmigrant state and changing beliefs. Support stemming from family and social networks as well as cultural traditions have helped uphold the women’s honor and wholeness as mothers, leaders, and active community members.

*El Migrante and the Pressures of Looking for a Suitable Husband: What are the Preferences of Mexican Women Regarding the Men Who Leave and Those That Stay?*

In such a small village such as La Lomita, with less than 500 people and with few available employment or educational opportunities, a main objective for women in the village becomes finding a suitable husband. This means finding a mate that is reliable, hardworking, and capable of providing for a family. At the research setting, this automatically translates as a man who migrates. It makes perfect sense that women would prefer someone who works abroad. Most of the respondents, especially the younger women, agree that there is a definite preference for males who migrate.

Crossing the border to work almost becomes a rite of passage or transition into adulthood. Males usually head north for the first time in their early teenage years. Respondents in the village remark that this is a time in their life when they are going through many changes yet they are still children in the eyes of the elders. Going away for work in a completely different country where many sacrifices need
to be made and hard labor endured alongside other males often much older, forces a young man to mature at a younger age. In a couple of years these “children” come back to the village transformed into men ready for marriage. Young women of the village take good note of this. Thus, the prevailing sentiments at the research setting are that males are expected to travel across the border into the United States for employment. It is believed that this will give them the best option to ensure an economically stable family. Thus, it is not surprising that women would choose a male who migrates over one who does not.

Once settled in the United States young migrating males start saving money. Generally money is accumulated in order to buy land or to begin building a house for a future family in La Lomita. Many times they are not even present for much of the construction of the house. Instead, a family member back in the village takes charge of everything including managing the money that is sent for anything needed. Single girls in the village notice the building of these new houses. Young men take pride in their houses, as it is proof of their hard work across the border. These houses have become quite large and elaborate in recent years. Some young males begin and finish building a house even when they do not have a girlfriend. The younger women converse about the males who migrate and who have built a house. They joke around saying “well, if I marry him then I will live in that house!” Or, “if I marry so and so then I will have to move to that other village.” Often such a house that is built while the man is across the border does not get used at all because migrant males increasingly take their wives with them to the United States.
Men perfectly understand and recognize that in order to find a wife they need to *sentar cabaza* or settle down, which to them pretty much means traveling north for employment. Most head to the United States during their early teenage years and start working alongside relatives or family friends. They soon become part of the transnational labor migration phenomena whereby migrants form and sustain simultaneous complex social relations that link together their societies of origin with temporary settlements in the United States. The men remain connected to their loved ones through phone calls, remittances, and visits to México.

When these young, single men return to the village during their work vacations they make sure that they come back as if returning for a red carpet celebration. That is, they reenter the village looking better than ever, with good brand new clothes and shoes, nice clean haircut, well shaved, and pockets full of dollars. At times, this might include even returning with a nice car. For instance, it is very common to see cars with plates from Pennsylvania, Delaware and Illinois especially during the holidays when the largest numbers of male migrant workers return home. Respondents claim that coming back under these circumstances is like heaven for these young males as they are not only coming home to see friends and family, but they are coming home to a place overwhelmed by tons of eager single girls. Young single females view this as an opportunity to find a good catch and so the young single women in the village tend to "bring up their game" by looking a little better than usual, especially during the holiday months of December and January when the village welcomes many of their absent menfolk back to the village. Who can blame them? They are trapped in a community where most males in their
age group are away so they will often put themselves on display in hopes of being noticed by one of the returning young men.

During my summer stay in La Lomita, I witnessed firsthand this social pattern. My teenage cousin visited with me during his summer vacation from school and even though he is not a migrant worker or even close to being a mature, young adult, little teenage girls were going crazy for him. It was as if they had not seen a guy in their life. Many teenage girls would visit my grandmother’s house asking for him, which is saying a lot considering that such assertive behavior is not considered proper conduct for a young lady in rural communities such as La Lomita. Within the first week of his visit, my 15-year-old cousin had a girlfriend. On the other hand, the men that do not leave and stay behind fall short as they cannot easily compete with those that do cross the border and return like kings. Those few young men who remain at the research site are not able to impress or provide what the women want or expect.

While none of the participants openly admitted to choosing to marry their husbands because of U.S. residency or citizenship, all of them agreed that the legal status of a man in the U.S. is an important factor. According to several of the village women many young girls with high hopes of migrating to the U.S. will purposely chose a husband with legal documentation just so he will be able to take her abroad. During a group interview while discussing this topic several of the women told me about Rosa’s story. Rosa, a twenty year old and her boyfriend Martin, who resides in a neighboring village, dated for about four months and, as the story goes, Martin told Rosa that he was a green card holder. So, for Rosa, Martin was the whole
package, and soon after she left with him. A couple days later she found out that he had lied to her, and he did not have any type of legal documentation at all. Rosa gets really mad and leaves Martin, but due to social pressure and stigma, she eventually goes back to him. Rosa became pregnant and is staying with her parents in La Lomita while Martin is working without documentation in the U.S. Respondents claim that such a case reveals that village women prefer and are willing to marry a man who has documents, but also that a man could lie about his status in order to trap a woman.

Out of all the single young women interviewed only four had a formal boyfriend. Dating in rural villages like La Lomita is quiet a ceremonial, strict, and at times complicated custom. Traditionally, the suitor is expected to get parental permission to date a girl by formally requesting the girl’s father for authorization to so. Now in days this is not as common, however girls are nevertheless expected to acquire parental consent before dating a boy. Once parental approval is given the parents set rules regarding courtship.

For example, determining the number of days and times when the boyfriends can come and platicar (talk) to their daughter. Platicar is a form of dating in which days and times have been arranged for the boyfriend to come and talk or spend time with his girlfriend. Parents will usually only allow this socialization to take place right outside their home where the couple is visible. The pair then just sits right outside of the house front steps where not only the parents can keep an eye on them but were they are also in plain view of the community. For example, Lila and her boyfriend meet on her front door steps where they sit and talk every Tuesday,
Thursday, and Saturday from five to seven P.M. On Saturdays they have permission to take a walk around the village where they buy and enjoy junk food as Lila states. Public display of affection is not acceptable or tolerated; even holding hands is rare among most young couples. Moreover, many young girls in La Lomita have boyfriends who are in the United States. Mercedes, one of the participants, maintained a relationship with Pedro, who was working in the U.S. during my field research. They kept in contact through phone calls as well as through social media sites such as Facebook. Mercedes stated to be dating Pedro against her father’s wishes, as he did not allowed her to date, however her mother knows about their relationship and has kept it from her husband. It is usually these types of situations that cause young girls to irse or run away with their boyfriends. The term robar, which literally means to steal, is also used to refer to this act, thus referring to a man stealing his girlfriend from her parents. Once a girl leaves with her boyfriend she becomes a married women in the eyes of the community.

The most appropriate or respectable way of marriage is that by which the boyfriend formally asks the parents for the hand of her daughter followed by religious and legal marital procedures. However, unofficial marriages or unities, where a girl decides to just leave with her boyfriend without parental permission is very common in La Lomita. Many times young girls will run away with their boyfriends right before they head back to work in the United States.

All of the young single participants explained that they feel pressured by their mothers and other family members to find a suitable husband. Many of them however defended or justified these pressures as reasonable by explaining that their
mothers only want the best for them and want them to be with someone who will take care of them. Responses of mother participants, about this matter, corresponded to the explanations given by the younger girls. In addition, many of these mothers stated that they worry much more for their daughters when it comes to marriage than their sons: “it’s important to make sure that girls chose a good man because they will be with them for the rest of their life and you do not want to end up with a drunk or a man that hits you because then your stuck there, sons on the other hand will be in control.”

Regarding legal status, all young single participants stated a preference for a husband who migrates over one that does not and explained that under the best case scenario legal documentation would obviously be better. It seems that women do not necessarily think that a man with documentation is more desirable than a man who migrates without documents. The women only see having documents as an added bonus.

Regardless of the reality in La Lomita, sweatpants or jeans and a t-shirt comprise the standard wardrobe on a typical Monday through Thursday. However, once the weekend rolls around the young women in the village dress to impress. For example, on Thursday through Saturdays the local restaurant opens up for dinner and attracts the young crowd (from nearby villages as well), as it has become the hang out spot. On these days the young girls put on their best clothes and head over to Chal’s (name of the restaurant owner), which is located near the village chapel, and Carmela’s store which sells beer. Here, returning boyfriends from across the border meet their girlfriends and stay out for a longer period of time as opposed
to other days. Usually groups of young women come in to the small restaurant, order food and chat while most young men hang out right outside of Carmela’s store sipping on beer. As the night continues, single young men and women convene either in the restaurant or outside giving them a chance to mingle with one another.

Similarly, women also tend to dress up when they go out to the city or on the days when they see their boyfriends and whenever there is a party or social event in the village. The girls who do not wear their finer clothes at least on these occasions are criticized, especially if they are single. The disapproval typically comes from older women saying such things as, “how are you going to find a husband if you never look nice” and “you will end up a nun if you keep that up.” Gloria admits to being one of these girls. She says that she doesn’t like getting all “dolled-up” just to please other people. “Maybe if I did I would have at least a boyfriend by now” she jokes. She understands that she needs to be more “womanly” and knows that the women in the village talk about her because she doesn’t “put on airs.” But, clearly she doesn’t seem to care about what people may think or if she will or not find a husband. Her younger sister Silvia, on the other hand, is always dressed nicely no matter the day. “She’s going to beat me to marriage I know” Gloria states.

Likewise, Alicia doesn’t seem to be much concerned about looks or looking for a boyfriend. Her family moved out of the village and now lives in the city and says both her mother and older sister get on her case about making herself more attractive. Alicia works in a restaurant. On weekdays, when it is most busy, her sister insists that she wear something nice by saying, “put on your nice black blouse! You never know, you may meet someone today.” On the other hand there are also
some young girls who will always look the part at any given day of the week. These women are also criticized and sometimes stereotyped as being “too desperate.” For example, in the case of Mercedes, she doesn’t step out her house unless she wears make up, her hair is done, and is wearing a well-matched outfit. She admits that she likes to look good and enjoys getting the attention from the boys. One day a group of girls, including myself, decided to go on a hike in the countryside just outside the village. Mercedes took forever preparing herself even though it was just to go on a hike, her friends would tell her... “Hurry up, it doesn’t even matter, no one is going to see you anyways we are just going to walk in the woods.” But, there was no way Mercedes was going to chance it. Her friends agreed that she will be the next one in their “single girl group” to get married.

There is a group of “older” women (old for a women is considered someone in her late twenties and early 30s) in La Lomita who are single. Most people in the village think that such women will not marry at all, and almost see them as a lost cause as most men usually choose a female a couple years younger than their own age. It seems that they have also accepted such a label. However, they do still go out, dress up and seem to be just like the other younger single girls in the village, still hoping that they will be able to find someone. Usually these types of women find jobs in the nearby town or city, or live out their lives caring for their older relatives. Often, they find a way to travel North, across the border, to work and stay with a close family member. It is felt that once in the U.S.A these older women have better chances of finding a boyfriend and marrying.

Absent Husbands: How Do Mexican Women Adapt to a Living Situation in
Which Their Men are Absent?

For many years, communities in México have been experiencing the living situation where the men leave and the women stay. It is so common that it is actually rare for a man to stay with his family and not migrate. Outsiders would be quick to label this situation as unusual, abnormal, or strange. However, this whole concept of the men being away and the women staying behind is not unusual for La Lomita’s residents.

Virtually all of the women interviewed considered the absence of their husbands, boyfriends, fathers, uncles, and brothers the normal way of life. La Lomita is not much different from the many other rural villages in Guanajuato; houses are painted in bright colors, paved roads have more holes than a whack-a-mole game, and the majority of the men are away working in the United States, all very ordinary.

Ever since the Bracero program, one of the first labor contracts between México and the United States, women in small rural villages like La Lomita have been raised with absent fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers and cousins. While the program allowed for a large number of Mexican men to work in the agricultural fields in the United States, it also led to what has now become the norm: the men head north for work while the women and children stay behind. For over one hundred years women have endure the absence of their men, generation after generation young and old head north for work, thus becoming such a common practice that it is now expected for every male, to the point that it is very rare for a male to choose not to go abroad. Those who decide to stay in the village and not
migrate, especially younger males, become target of labels such as "flojo" or "lazy," and "bueno para nada" or "good for nothing." Males undergo much pressure from their families, peers, and the community as a whole to carry on what has come to mean the appropriate way to achieve a better life. It appears that women have adapted to this “male absence” living situation. It is now the norm, and has been embraced as the “right” or “better” way of life.

All of the women I came to know in the village spent their childhood while their fathers and other male family members were away working in the U.S. for long periods, sometimes up to three to six years at a time. As the women grew older they came to understand that their future husbands would surely be absent just as were their own fathers. Maria comments:

“I don’t really think it’s even a process of adaptation, it’s more like every woman is already programmed to live this way. You already consciously know, and are certain that you will get married and your husband will leave, and all you can do is hope that one day you will also be able to go north with him. Your father, your grandfather, your uncles all of them have done the same so you grow up knowing that he will leave and you will stay behind and that is how it is. ‘A si son las cosas, no hay de otra.’ This is how it’s always been, there is no other option.”

The women do not necessarily view this unusual living arrangement as a hardship, per say; to them this is just how things are. Even when asked about what they see as their ideal living arrangement, they hesitate, as if such question could only be answered with an impossible or unrealistic response. Most of the women
want to have a husband who works abroad because that means that she will be better off. Thus, the need to be economically stable is greater than that of being with your partner.

Even while dating, most of the young women of the village experienced a long distance relationship whereby a courtship was maintained even while their boyfriends were across the border in the United States. Contact with absent male friends continues, but instead of seeing each other in person, they speak on the phone. This practice continues even after marriage—relationship by telephone. While house phones and cell phones are now common in the village, not long ago, when phones were only accessible in the city the women had to travel outside the village and pay a fee in order to use a telephone to speak to their husbands. Some of the older women of the village recall a time when the only way of communication with their distant husbands was through letters.

When the time comes for the husband to return to the United States, it is common for women to move back to their parent’s house. This practice occurs, particularly for wives who are pregnant, or those who have small children, as it is not well regarded by the village community for a woman to live alone. For the wives whose family resides in another village, a sister or other female relative usually comes over and stays with the wife while the husband is away. For instance, Lucia, one of the participants, moved from her home in the city to her mother’s house in La Lomita, not just because her husband was away at the time, but also because she was expecting her first child. Some women do stay alone in their houses after their husband departs. Such women however, usually become pray to gossip.
Participants expressed that while it is customary for the men to cross the border, it is always hard to see the men you love leave while you stay behind. Rocio states, “the first time they leave after being married is always the hardest to endure, but after that it just becomes a way of life.” Some of the participants expressed becoming so used to this life that when sudden changes emerged it took some time and work to readjust. For example, Sandra remarks that when her husband stays an unusual long period of time with in México, it almost throws off their relationship a little because they are so used to him leaving that when he stays for a longer time, adjustments need to be made--particularly with the children, in order to uphold a normal day-to-day life. Many of the women reported feeling strained when their husbands stayed for longer periods of time. Margarita explains this by stating, “We learn to be wives for a couple weeks maybe a couple months and single mothers for the rest of the year...we get used to living this way and when they (husbands) stay for longer periods it sometimes triggers problems in the relationship because we do not know how to deal with each other.” Some participants recalled that once their own fathers got older and could no longer cross the border for work, and came back to stay in México for good, it was almost like the relationship of their parents worsened. The way they saw it was that their parents got along better when husbands were periodically away and now that they themselves are living under the same circumstances that their mothers lived they can finally relate and understand many of the troubles they saw their own parents struggle with.

“I considered my parents marriage to be good. When my father was away he would call my mother often and during his visits they were happy together.
When I got engaged and my father came to give me away he ended up staying for an unusual long period of time, it was then that I noticed they weren’t getting along which did not make sense to me. I mean your husband is here why wouldn’t that make you happy? Right? But now I understand that one gets used to living alone you know? Doing things your way and we are not used to living with them for long periods and when that happens problems rise because you’re suddenly bombarded with things you never had to deal with before, that’s what happened to my parents.”

When the husbands return, the women indicate having more chores with additional clothes to wash and more food to prepare. Nonetheless, for the most part, married participants described the returns of their husbands as a recurring honeymoon. Participants also mentioned feeling a sense of relief, protection, and security because their man was home. The number of visits that a migrant worker can make across the border, such as many husbands of the women at La Lomita, depends greatly on legal status and type of employment performed in the United States. For example, those who are undocumented stay longer periods working across the border, thus return trips are less frequent. Moreover, these workers have a harder time finding work. Once they do find work, it is usually for minimum wages, and these individuals quickly become overworked. These men send less money back home which results in these women suffering more stress. Those who are documented have a greater chance of finding more lucrative employment and are able to return home more often. Yet, a few of these cannot travel often for fear
of losing their better employment. The men, who work as migrant agricultural laborers, return to México at the end of work cycle of the seasonal crops.

As explained by participants, the husband saves up enough money to be able to keep his family afloat and bring a little extra to enjoy while he is in México. Therefore, most of the time the family enjoys more trips to the city, paying for a taxi instead of riding the bus, eating out and visiting new places while their husband is in town. It is a vacation for the husband, and so it also becomes a vacation for the entire family.

While the women see their "long distance marriages" as a normal part of their lives, the women agree that trust is also very important in their marriage. One of the women, Angelina, states, “The fear of your husband potentially cheating on you is present in every women’s head.” Such could be easily explained because of the geographic separation from their wives, but Angelina also comments: “most often, when a husband cheats, the wife is fully aware of her husband’s disloyalty.” Being separated by hundreds of miles does not keep locals from talking about other people’s lives. It was probably a lot easier to keep a secret years ago when only a few people migrated but now with the existence of a strong connection between those in México and those on the other side it is only a matter of time before someone’s indiscretion is revealed. Many times a migrating husband will keep two wives, one in México and a second in the U.S. This was the case of one of the participants, Cristina. After almost six years of marriage and three children Cristina found out that her husband Lalo had a second wife in the United States. She explains that at the beginning it was just a rumor, however Cristina states that there
were strong indicators that pointed to her husband’s supposed infidelity. For instance, Lalo’s visits to México became less frequent and Cristina received less money each month to the point where no money was sent at all. It was Franco, Cristina’s padrino (godfather) who confirmed her not only that indeed Lalo had another women in the U.S. but also that he had a child with that woman. Cristina became a dejada, a women who fracaso or who “failed” in her marriage. Cristina’s two older brothers stepped in and financially cared for her and the children. In Cristina’s case there was never a divorce however there was a permanent separation. Other women however maintain a marriage relationship with their husbands even while knowing that they are unfaithful. It is not that the village women want to tolerate such behavior, it is more that they just have to live with it. Maria explains, “how can a women living in a village like this make it on her own? There are bills to pay, children need to be fed and now schools ask for so much…uniforms, school supplies…they need so much.” Some women feel like there is just nothing they can do if their husband has a second wife or mistress. After all, if they were to rebel they would risk not getting any assistance from them at all. One of the young participants noted “I don’t even care if my dad has another woman over there as long as he keeps sending us money.”

Furthermore, respondents with children also note that not only do they have to endure the departure and absence of their husbands, but eventually they will also have to do the same with their sons. The migration of their young sons not only causes stress and pain to the mothers but also breaks down the family unit even more. Women who had sons in the United States stated that they talked to them
frequently and some of them mentioned that the long distance actually brought them closer together. “When my son left he was only a kid, and you know at that age they’re not open with us as parents, but now we talk often and he shares a lot more than he ever did when he was here...I really like that.” On the other hand, young women of La Lomita with brothers across the border say that they speak to them from time to time but feel as if they grow apart as time passes by. Some of these young men will meet their future wife in the USA and will start a life and a family of their own far away from their family of birth. Dolores’s son Francisco, for instance, crossed the border when he was fifteen years old. Now he is twenty-one, married, and has a son. Francisco has not returned to México since he left, Dolores only knows his daughter-in-law and grandson by the photographs they mail her.

Contact is kept with husbands through daily phone calls whereby the women are able to keep their husbands updated with what goes on with the children and events taking place back in the home village. Most of the women specified that even when their husbands are away they still ask them for permission to do certain things. For example, can their daughter have a boyfriend, or if a son can go on a school fieldtrip, or even something as small as buying new appliances for the house, thus husbands preserve their authority even when absent. These periodic phone calls are extremely important, as they are the most efficient way women are able to have voice contact with their husbands.

**Absent Fathers: How Does Having a Long Distance Marriage Affect the Family Dynamics?**
“Transnational labor migration is undoubtedly a life-changing event for the family---The physical absence of a family member for long periods compels the family to reorganize its strategies, structures, and relations during the migration process.” (Hoang & Yeoh, 2011, pp. 177-178)

When women adopt the roles that have traditionally been ascribed to men, the modifications and changes experienced by the person who leaves and those that stay behind become of greater importance. A challenge faced by the translational family following the father’s departure is the raising of left-behind children without a father figure. Thus, not only do the men undergo an excessive amount of stress while struggling to adapt to the life of a migrant to the United States, but also the periodic and sometimes sporadic movement across the border similarly causes anxiety on the families back in México. This irregular movement between two countries has inevitably altered the concept of what the traditional Mexican family once was.

All of the women interviewed grew up with a father who was absent throughout their lives due to migration. In addition, these women also grew up with absent older brothers, male cousins and uncles. To these women this way of life became the norm as all of their friends’ fathers and male relatives were also across the border. Most grew up knowing that their father was in the United States working. As little girls, many remember feeling excitement when their father was to return home as gifts were expected. They all do agree, however, that because their father wasn’t around much they now lack a daughter-father bond. Young participants suggest that growing up they felt like their fathers tried to substitute
fatherly love with presents and money. Valentina states, “every September my dad would call and ask what I wanted for my birthday...I always got exactly what I asked for and more...many presents but never him.” Some of them even describe their father’s return visits to México as uncomfortable, “I feel uncomfortable when he’s here, and I know he probably feels the same...its like having a strange man stay in your house for a couple of weeks. Yet, I know that he’s my father, but it doesn’t feel like it, you know? I don’t really know him, and he doesn’t really know me.”

Feeling uncomfortable, weird, and tense with their fathers during their stay were common responses among the young participants. Mother participants gave similar reactions about how they saw the interaction between their children with their fathers during their visits to México. “When their dad is here and they (children) ask me for money or permission to do or go somewhere I send them to ask their dad. A lot of times they will not go where they want to as they refuse to ask their dad.” Another participant explains that during her husband’s visits her three children rarely talk back or throw a fit when their father scolds them, “they just remain quiet,” which as the mother reassures does never happen when she becomes the disciplinarian. Other young participants, like Lucia say that even though she remembers feeling strange with the irregular presence of her father, she wanted him to stay and not leave, “I felt impotent, I wanted him to stay, but I couldn’t do anything to stop him.” Many other participants also commented about being bothered when their fathers came home and did nothing to help around in the house, “I just don’t get it, in the U.S. they have to cook and clean and do all the “womanly” things but then they come here and can’t even get water for themselves.”
Even though married women have become accustomed to the physical absence of their husbands, the children on the other hand, as noted by participants, take a longer time to adjust and to get used to living with and then without their fathers. The stress that this absence generates is not so easily managed. Not surprisingly, the most common source of stress reported by married respondents was related to child rearing. Many of the women described themselves as being “like single mothers.” When the husbands are away, women take full responsibility for the wellbeing of their children. This means that the women have to not only take care of the children’s basic needs such as feeding and bathing, but also take on the disciplinary role that the men traditionally assume in the Mexican family unit. Therefore, women have to learn how to be mothers and fathers at the same time. One young mother commented: “It’s hard, as a mother we want to spoil our children and sometimes we even let them get away with many things, but we have to learn to be tough with them because they don’t have a father present... and they need that, so we have to be tough...specially with the boys.”

Respondents with young male children all believed that their sons needed their fathers around more so than did their daughters need their fathers. “He (refereeing to sixteen year old son) just doesn’t listen to me anymore, goes out to drink in La Barranquilla (neighboring village) and gets back the next morning... I worry, but what can I do? He wouldn’t be doing this if his father was here.” The women argue that the absence of husbands has a big impact on young boys, sometimes leading them into trouble. While young Mexican women did not feel that the absence of their fathers has had a major impact in their lives, their mothers did
think that the girls needed the presence of their fathers to “scare off the boys,” adding that “there should always be a man in a house to protect the family.” Some of the women explained that they have attempted to reconstruct, and or maintain a bond between the children and their far away father through phone calls, but state that the children do not show much interest to talk to their fathers.

Contact is kept with husbands through daily phone calls whereby the women are able to keep their husbands updated with what goes on with the children and events taking place back in the home village. Most of the women specified that even when their husbands are away they still ask them for permission to do certain things. For example, can their daughter have a boyfriend, or if a son can go on a school fieldtrip, or even something as small as buying new appliances for the house, thus husbands preserve their authority even when absent. These periodic phone calls are extremely important, as they are the most efficient way women are able to have voice contact with their husbands.

Moreover, while the young women agree that life is economically improved when you have a father abroad, as he is better able to provide for the family and is able to afford many things for his children that these children would not have otherwise, they also agree that it is accomplished at the expense of not being with their family. While the young women are more vocal about their feelings toward such conditions, most of them have accepted that that is how life is in places like La Lomita. Young women with more education however, as with Alejandra and Lucia, both remark that they do not want their children to grow up like they did, with an absent father and in a place where there are no opportunities to better themselves.
The rest of the girls back in the village feel like they have no choice. Most do not really think about the likelihood of having a husband that will stay in the village. Having a husband who crosses the border outweighs having one in the village, as they will be more financially stable.

The continued separation produced by migration is very difficult for all involved as it implicates emotional difficulties for husband, wife and children. The emotional effects of such separation are concerted among the children who have the least control. However, the bond of commitment for parents and children is reinforced by the sacrifices involved in these long separations as many of these migrating husbands send money that provides their children with better educational opportunities. Children however, are unsure of their relationships with their fathers.

**Older and Younger Generations: How Do Young Mexican Women View This “Unusual” Living Situation?**

While the consequences of such living situation are widely expressed by the women in everyday conversations, the mere concept of what the living situation has become is something that the women, both old and young, do not think much about. After all, this way of life is the only one they know. It was only when specific questions were asked during their routine daily life that they began to consider the deeper issues of their circumstances. Each with a different view of the subject yet both generations of women affected alike.

The older generation of Mexican women rationalize that while this way of life may not be perfect it is certainly better than the life that their grandmothers,
mothers and they themselves experienced growing up. For example, Margarita, forty-nine years old, explains that when she was in the third grade she had to leave school to help her mother with household chores. Her older brother had already left school the previous year to help their father in the fields and now it was her turn to do the same. Things got even tougher when Margarita’s father suffered a heart attack that took his life. At age ten, Margarita was taking care of the cooking and the household chores while her mother and two brothers would take a daily trip to town on foot, carrying firewood to sell to the townspeople. Her younger brother never attended school, Margarita and her mother taught him how to read and write at home. “It wasn’t until my two brothers headed north that things got better,” she affirms.

Eva, fifty-three years old, also shares her life story growing up in a humble home made of rocks, mud and a tile ceiling: “We all slept in tepetates (a mat made out of reed), all in one room, we each had our own. I didn’t sleep in a real bed until I got married and moved to my mother-in-law’s house.”

Dolores, forty-five years of age, describes her first three years of marriage as the worst years of her life. When Dolores got married she moved in with her in-laws, a common custom for newlyweds, especially for those without a house of their own. Dolores remarks: “My mother-in-law did not like me at all. She made my life hell...nothing I did was good enough for her nothing.” Dolores endured three long years in her mother-in-law’s house while her husband was away in the USA. Once he returned he began building their own house and soon they moved out of her in-laws and she was able to finally live happily. Many of the older women at the
research site also stated living with their in-laws for the first few years of their marriage. While it is still common, nowadays most men have a house built by the time they get married. However, those that do not migrate are more likely to not have a house of their own.

“A si son las cosas” (this is how things are), is an expression I continued to hear during interviews and informal conversations with the women of the village. Interestingly, older, married women seem to relate their circumstances to this expression more so than the younger generations. While some of the younger women also accept this tradition just as past generations have, many have somehow managed to breach this code of conduct, and have chosen a different way of life across the border.

Alejandra, Twenty-two years old, did not want to settle for a Middle School education and decided to move to the city with her maternal grandparents so she could continue on to High School. She was only fifteen years old at the time, but states that she was not afraid to just go for it because she was determined to be “someone in life...growing up I didn’t think about marriage or having children I fantasized about becoming a lawyer or a doctor.” With family to care for her in the city and a father in the U.S. who could financially support her schooling, Alejandra was ready to keep going, “I didn’t even feel bad leaving...I think I wanted to get away from life in La Lomita where my only future would be marriage... school was my ticket out of there.” Similarly, Lucia, twenty-one years old, also left La Lomita during her teenage years to pursue an education in the city. Both young girls graduated from high school and went as far as enrolling in university programs.
However, both Alejandra and Lucia had to leave school due to financial issues. Nonetheless, neither of them returned to La Lomita. They stayed in the city and both found employment. Alejandra has been working at a bank for four years and has been able to financially help her family. Lucia, on the other hand took a job as a nanny for a wealthy family. During that time, she took several art and crafts workshops where she learned how to paint and make plaster figurines. Lucia is now married. Although she has an apartment in the city, she is currently staying in La Lomita with her mother because she is expecting twins and her husband was working in the U.S. In the village, she opened a small shop, which keeps her busy and she's able to make some extra money.

Alejandra and Lucia both express a desire to cross the border to the United States. Lucia wants to be able to work with her husband in the USA, and to provide a better life for her children. Her husband has started the paper process for a Visa that would allow Lucia and her infant children entrance to the U.S. Thus, Lucia has a chance to fulfill her wish to go abroad, however she states that if that is not possible she wants her husband to stay in México and find work in the city. Alejandra, on the other hand, has a permanent residency card (i.e., green card), and says she has been seriously thinking about moving to the U.S. to attend school there. However, family difficulties in México, like her little brother’s medical condition, have delayed that dream, but she clings to the possibility of leaving México.

Alejandra may not be exactly where she wishes she could be in life but she has accomplished more, and gone further than most of the girls her age who remain in La Lomita. Lucia has also taken a stance against the typical way of life where the
men leave and the women stay behind. Both she and Alejandra have shown that it is possible to get further in life than just remaining in La Lomita.

Others do not have the financial or the family support to continue their education even if they wanted to. In the case of Valentina, twenty-three years old, who was only able to finish high school in a nearby rural school comments: “I went as far as I could!...but I am irritated with the Mexican educational system for not offering opportunities for young students to continue with their education.”

Moreover, the young women show frustration as they talk about finishing high school but then not having resources or family support to go to the city to look for work. Others, like Gabby, are perfectly fine with their life, not minding the village life and looking forward to get married and form a family.

Unlike the older generation of Mexican women, all but one of the young women of the village stated that they would definitely choose to live in the USA. To them, the United States is like an escape or even a type of salvation, describing it as a place where, “women can work, go to school, and make it on their own without a man.” The young women typically give examples of others who had left the village and now have a better life. The young women tended to speak of moving to the USA not so much with a future husband, but as a single women taking advantage of increased opportunities that they would have across the border.

The younger generation of Mexican women are much more outspoken about what they see as social injustice. They have more education than their parents, yet they are often still trapped in the same cycle as the older women of La Lomita. Furthermore, while many of the young women of the village want to get married in
the near future, the older women in the village argue that these young girls are not prepared, whatsoever, for marriage: “They want to have a boyfriend and all but they don’t even know how to cook an egg, what is that?” Many of the young women admit that their mother does most of the house chores and that they do not help as much as they should, but defend themselves by stating that their mothers never made them do any chores growing up so, “they cannot expect them to do something when it was never asked of them.”

**Hopes to Travel Abroad: How Do Mexican Women Believe Things Will Change Once They Can Also Migrate to the United States to be With Their Men?**

Immigrants come to the United States from all over the world in search of the American Dream. For the Mexican people the American Dream, at the very least, has been the opportunity to find employment. Facing hard physical labor and low wages Mexican men continue to migrate across the border in order to offer their families back in México a better life. Through those that leave, those who stay have absorbed the “wonders” that the U.S. offers: employment, women’s rights, government support and education. Thus, Mexican women have grown up with the idea that the United States is the only country where they could possibly have prosperity and success as well as an upward social mobility within their reach. Consequently, it is not surprising that most of the participants, specially the younger generation reported that travelling to the U.S. was their ultimate dream.

“Over there (U.S.) there are opportunities, lots of them, you just have to work really hard but they are there. What opportunities do we (referring to women) have here? None.” Comments like these were common among participants. To support
such opinion, many participants gave examples of various female relatives and friends whose life changed dramatically after they migrated to the United States. For example, Maria explains how her childhood friend Teresa, who left to the U.S. along with her husband as a newlywed has a life that she would have never had, had Teresa stayed in the village. Maria goes on to explain that her friend Teresa is able to bring a paycheck home, learned how to drive and owns her own car, and describes how her daughter just left for college.

“You can’t do none of that here...look at my life and look at Teresa’s life...we both grew up here, we both got married in our late teens, we both have three children but she left and I stayed, that’s the difference between our lives...she left and now enjoys a better life and what opportunities do I have? I wouldn’t be able to find a good job even if I tried and even if I did it would never be enough to purchase a car much less send my daughter to college, we could hardly pay her high school education.”

Every participant identified at least one story of a known female who prospered in the U.S. Dolores spoke about her sister-in-law Karina, who as Dolores says, “even gets help during and after her pregnancy” (referring to the services provided by WIC). Alejandra talks about her cousin Carolina who migrated when she was only 12 years old. As Alejandra states Carolina was the first person in her entire family to graduate from college, went on to receive a Master’s degree and is now a professional. Eva, tells how her ex-neighbor a single mother of three who could barely put food on her table migrated and was able to “make it” in the U.S. “Women like her, raising children all on their own was able to overcome so much.
She left, found a job and her children were able to go to college and now they take care of her. That doesn't happen here it just doesn't."

I also had the chance to interview Sandra, a woman who left La Lomita seven years ago and who was back in the village visiting her family. Sandra was born and raised in La Lomita, she only finished elementary school and married a few days after her twentieth birthday. As soon as her husband was able to attain a green card for her she migrated and began a new life in the U.S. with him. While she admits that life, as an immigrant is not “all happiness” she does state that the overall quality of life is ten times better than life in La Lomita. “Looking back now I thank God I left,” she says as she goes on to tell me about how proud she is of her older son Daniel, who just graduated high school with a full scholarship for college and how her younger daughter Elena is learning how to play the piano. “I work in a factory packing fruit, it’s tiring and I dislike not being able to spend more time with my children at home but my husband and I are able to give them a better life, a life that we could only dream of when we where kids plus there (U.S.) they have so much more support and opportunities...life is definitely better over there than it is here.”

It is through women like Sandra, who at one point were just like the rest of the women in the village but headed North and now come back to visit attached to all these great stories of life accomplishments, that makes women that still remain in the village aspire such life.

Subsequently, the participants especially the younger women stated that migrating to the United States would allow them to not only live a better life but also be able to earn a better life through employment and education opportunities.
However, while all of the respondents agreed that life was better in the U.S. there was a distinction within the women regarding their actual desire to leave. Younger as well as single respondents showed more enthusiasm to leave and no hesitation to start a new life in the U.S. if the opportunity came. The older married participants stated not having any desire to migrate while participants whose husbands were back for good had already given up on the dream of leaving.

When asked about their thoughts regarding migrating to the U.S. to be with their husbands, the older women seem to not have much of an urge to leave at all. In fact, many of the more elderly women stated that when they married they never even had a desire to migrate with their husbands. Some of the women remarked that had they had the chance to migrate they probably would not have done it. Some explained that they wouldn’t want to leave their parents behind, and others admitted to being frightened about going to a foreign country. Two of the women of the village were green card holders, yet they had never been across the border to the U.S.

Marisela is forty years old and refuses to leave the village, claiming to be uninterested, and says that she wouldn’t leave her parents behind. In her words, “...People leave and don’t come back for years, they just leave and their parents stay here alone. And then when parents die, they come back to the village, for what? Why come after they’re dead?” Marisela has a point. There are a number of senior residents all alone in La Lomita because all of their children have settled in the U.S. Those who crossed the border without documents often cannot even return to bury their parents. Some of those who have settled in the U.S. along with their family will
acquire a traveling Visa for elderly family members, as it is much cheaper for grandparents to travel to the U.S. than an entire family to return to México. However, many older residents of the village do not like living in the United States. Guadalupe, seventy-five years old, for example has been going back and forth for the past three years and says that she feels blessed to be able to travel and see her children and grandchildren, but she just cannot get used to extended life in the U.S. So, she spends a few months at a time in each location, which becomes stressful as she states.

On the other hand, a few women of the village look back and regret not having taken advantage of the opportunity to go abroad. Sara, forty years of age, says: “maybe if I had insisted, I would be over there now.” Similarly, Carmelita, forty-five years old, comments: “When I was a newlywed my husband suggested that I leave with him and start a new life in the U.S., but I rejected his offer.” When I asked why she rejected his offer, she answered: “I was stupid, I should have left with him but I was scared...then I had children and it was no longer an option.”

Married participants who stated that they would be willing to head North explained that they of course wanted to do so to be able to be with their husbands but also mentioned wanting to migrate in order to work and to provide a better future to their children. Some of the participants stated being worried for the future of their children and the need for them to grow up with their fathers. Moreover, these participants stated also mentioned that while their migration would unify their immediate family at the same time there would be a disrupter of other family bonds like that of their own parents and other relatives and friends. One of the
participants mentioned fearing that things would get ugly if she and her children were to migrate and join her husband stating, “he (husband) would be under much more pressure if we left because he would have to look for housing.... and we would have to learn how to live together because well we technically haven’t lived together for more than three months.” Thus, in one hand the women see how their migration would help reunite and rebuild their family but at the same time they also consider the negative effects that this could possible have in their relationship.

Moreover, participants whose husbands were back in the village and who had not migrated for years feel as though they do not have the possibility nor the desire to migrate at all. These women explain that it is too late for them to go North and start all over again. All of these participants have at least one son or daughter and some even have all of their children in the U.S. While they state that they would like to see them more often they also mentioned that because they go years without seeing them many times their grandchildren feel no connection to them and are uncomfortable in the village.

**Independence and Empowerment**

Women have increasingly become more independent as they steadily take on duties within the community and become involved in positions that used to be only held by men. Thus, the absence of husbands has not only added anxiety to those who stay behind, but it has also shifted the traditional roles of men and women. At the same time however, this has caused women to become independent and empowered in many ways.
Women do not only take charge of their responsibilities in their household and the needs of their children, but they have also added responsibilities due to the absence of their husbands. For example, some women in La Lomita became fully responsible for growing crops (corn) as soon as their husbands departed. Working in the fields is seen as male only work, however, due to out-migration of the men folk, many women have taken on this vigorous work in the field.

Of all the left-behind women interviewed, only three women, did not perform any type of paid work at the time of my fieldwork. Those who did held low-waged jobs such as braiding *rebozos* and other textile related work. Braiding *rebozos* is a long process of braiding long thin strands of thick string into intricate designs on the traditional *rebozos* or shawls worn by Mexican women. Older women usually perform this type of work. The younger women opted for textile work, which took two forms; sowing pieces of clothing together and preparing the already completed garments by polishing and packaging these garments. There are two *talleres* or sewing workshops in the Lomita, which employs about fifteen young women.

Though insecure, these occupations produced enough money for home necessities and children’s needs for those with children, especially in the absence of remittances. Moreover, women were able to perform these jobs from home. Earning income was especially significant for these women as they reported to feel useful and independent, empowering them, as they are able to earn a wage and have some money to spend of their own.

Another source of empowerment that I noticed during my field research was the strong support the women of La Lomita had for one another. On my second
week in *el rancho* preparations for school graduations began to take place.

Graduation festivities take a great deal of work, most of which is undertaken by the women who’s children are graduating. The women organize themselves and collect money among them to buy what is needed. The women also decide who will be responsible for doing what, like for example who will be responsible for buying decorations, who will decorate the school, preparing the church for mass and so on. Nonetheless preparing a special dinner for the student graduate where family and friends enjoy traditional food and music is a long and exhausting endeavor. Dinner preparations usually began the day before the big day. On this day female relatives as well as other women in La Lomita show up at a house where help is needed. My grandmother and I helped our neighbor Carmelita. When we got to her house Carmelita’s patio was crowded with busy *mujeres*. Some were plucking feathers off headless chickens while others were in the kitchen chopping vegetables. After almost four hours of helping at Carmelita’s house, I was exhausted, however, the women seemed energetic and enthusiastic as they cooked while they chatted and laughed with each other. Some of these women were also present early the next morning to continue with food preparation.

Graduations are celebrated with a ceremony in the school grounds followed by student performances, which include dancing recitals and poem and paper reciting. After school celebrations are over there is a special mass given in honor of those who have graduated. After church, it’s finally time to enjoy the delicious feast the women work so hard on the day before. Enough food is prepared so that guests
are able to take extra food home and family members and neighbors who were not able to make it can have a taste.

Women also show support to one another when one of them gives birth or someone is sick. When a woman in La Lomita gives birth other women come not only to meet the new baby but also to help the new mom with chores around the house. When someone gets ill the neighboring women usually prepare food for the sick individual and help in anyway they can.

Moreover, these women have broken through their traditional roles as homemakers and have demonstrated to be leaders in the community by taking responsibilities outside of the home. Many of the women were active in the community, some volunteer for community services given by the church, others have duties within the school. A few have even taken community positions such as *promotoras* or promoters, who are in charge of setting meetings with all the women in the village where important announcements take place. Others also form part of the *padres de familia* group serving as directors for different school related matters.

Moreover, classes were offered for anyone in the village who wanted to increase their education. While these classes were offered to both men and women, only the women participated. By taking advantage of these classes many of the older women who never went to school are now learning how to read and write. Women report that these classes have not only allowed them to learn valuable skills like reading and writing, but have also helped built self-esteem. Others, like Maria and Margarita who began school but never finish are now able to take these classes and obtain certificates of completion for elementary and middle school education. Maria
explains that taking these classes have also triggered her son and her to spend more
time together as he is able to help her with her homework. Moreover, the continued
migration of young males and the increased focus on education by the Mexican
Government is persuading more girls than boys to continue with their schooling.

The slow but steady appearance of more education for women and girls as
well as the returning of more single independent women from the U.S. are signs of
empowerment for at least a few women in La Lomita. While married participants
identified their husband as the head of the family and as having the last say
regarding most of the family decisions, these women have been not only enduring
the absence of their husband and sometimes even sons and daughters, but have
been able to somehow make the best out of their circumstances. The cost of
empowerment for these women, however, is overwork, exhausting, and early aging.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This study addressed the following research questions, and sheds light on an often-neglected side of the immigration phenomena.

The first research question examined whether or not Mexican women have a preference for men that migrate over those that do not. *What are the preferences of Mexican women regarding the men who leave and those that stay?* All of the participants agreed that having a migrating husband created financial stability. Consequently, most of the participants stated that they would much rather be with someone who migrates over one that does not. For many of the young participants, looking for a suitable husband meant finding a nice young man who migrated or worked abroad. The act of migrating was almost synonymous with maturity and responsibility. Many participants, especially the older women, did not view young men that did not go abroad as established or reliable. This then created pressure and strain for young women to marry a migrating man. Women seem to not only prefer those that migrated, but also encourage migration. Moreover, many of the women also identified going abroad themselves as a desired goal, so marrying someone who had *papeles* or legal documentation was a bonus as it gave an opportunity for the women to travel and eventually settle abroad with their husbands.

On the other hand, many of the young participants in this study who left the village and attained higher education and/or good employment in the city understood the preference for migrating men but did not feel obligated or pressured
to find a migrating husband. These young girls believed that a financially stable life could be accomplished by staying in México and that education and leaving the village were keys to such life.

The second question focused on the wives of migrating husbands and their adaptation to a life where their partners are mostly absent. *How do Mexican women adapt to a living situation in which their men are absent?* The surprising finding here is that all of the women interviewed regarded the absence of their husband, father, and other male relatives and friends as completely normal. “*Así son las cosas*” (this is how things are) was a common response among participants. Growing up in a community where most men work abroad, the women understood at a young age that their future husbands would also leave. As stated above, not only was male migration encouraged, but it was also essential as economic pressures outweighed being with your partner. In small rural villages like La Lomita, traditional gender roles remain deeply embedded in the community where men as the head of the family became the main breadwinners, and were expected to provide for their family.

The most common source of stress reported by the women and associated with the absence of their husbands was the increased responsibilities in the home and outside the home, economic pressures in the absence of remittances, and the wellbeing of husbands, sons, and daughters living abroad. In addition, stress associated with the constant theft of phone cables was a big issue for the women of the village. During my stay in the research setting the phone cables of the village were stolen three consecutive times. It was believed that teenagers from a nearby
village were the perpetrators who would come to La Lomita during the night and steal the phone cables, which would then be sold. This caused much anger for the village women because it was their only way of communication with their husbands and relatives abroad. Moreover, the reinstallation of these phone cables took very long periods of time and participants reported feeling stressed, as they could not talk to their husbands.

Participants whose husbands were in México and who were no longer migrating reported feeling a “ordinary amount of stress” concerning not having enough money to afford certain things, or being unable to buy their children what they wanted. Nonetheless, these women reporting feeling somewhat at ease because their husbands were there and they no longer had to deal with this anxiety all on their own, “...because he’s here we are able to figure out how to handle the situation together and not like before when I felt like I was carrying everything on my shoulders.” Interestingly enough, many of the women reported feeling stressed even during their husband’s visits to México, “...when he’s over there I worry about his wellbeing and the problems he may be having, and when he comes here I also worry because I feel the pressure about him crossing back or the possibility that he will not get his job again or about the money running out and having no source of income because he’s here.”

Furthermore, residential status in the U.S. was a strong predictor of tension. Respondents whose husband worked in the U.S. without legal documentation reported higher levels of stress than those whose husband held some type of legal residency. For instance, these wives worried about the possibility of their husbands
being deported back to México. Furthermore, because undocumented migrants cannot so easily come and go, their wives and children have to endure longer periods of time without their husband’s presence at home. When undocumented husbands head north, strain is experienced as the family will not only worry about coming up with the sufficient amount of money to pay a Coyote to cross the border, but also because of the danger that this crossing involves. Some of the women reported not knowing the whereabouts of their husbands for days and sometimes even weeks. On the other hand, women with documented husbands did not have to worry about these things.

The third research question pointed to the issues produced by having a long distance marriage and its affects on the family structure. *How does having a long distance marriage affect the family dynamics?* Growing up without a father would logically affect any family. Thus, it is not surprising that the most common form of anxiety reported by participants of this study concerned childrearing. All of the interviewed mothers considered themselves single mothers as they became fully responsible for raising the children during their husbands’ long periods of work in the United States. Respondents considered caring for the children and their needs as the principal focus of their days. This then caused them to neglect their own needs.

Moreover, many of the respondents, especially those with teenage sons and daughters expressed feeling under much more stress as they worried about late night drinking for the boys and fear that their daughters may run away with a boyfriend. Women did not only worry about the wellbeing of their children but they
were also held responsible for the behavior of their children, especially of their daughters. For instance, if a girl is seen flirting around with boys, out late at night, or just not acting like a lady, the criticism comes back to her mother. Husbands hold their wives responsible for such behavior. Moreover, married women with children described a lack of bond between the children and their father. The women experienced anxiety resulting from their husband’s unsuccessful attempts to preserve or to re-establish such a bond.

The fourth question focused on the younger generation of Mexican women and their views on this “unusual” living situation whereby husbands leave and the wives stay behind. How do young Mexican women view this “unusual” living situation? This study found that while all of the young participants understood the reasons for such living arrangement, many of them did not conform to such a lifestyle. For instance, several of the participants pursued higher education by leaving the village and escaping from such a life. Others took jobs in the city. Those who attained higher education seemed to be more independent and were more optimistic about a better future with a husband who did not migrate.

The most common strain reported by young single women was that associated with the lack of education and work opportunities. This included pressures to find a suitable husband and the ever important emphasis and importance placed on marriage. Many of the young women reported feelings of confusion, anger and hopelessness. They explained that they were encouraged to continue and finish high school, but once finished they were not able to continue to college, due to a lack of economic assistance. Moreover, parents did not allow these
young girls to look for employment in the city which limited these young girls of personal and professional advancement.

The fifth and final question examined how Mexican women believed that things would change if they were to migrate to the United States to be with their men. *How do Mexican women believe things will change once they can also migrate to the United States to be with their men?* All of the women interviewed considered life in the United States as the ideal living space. Traveling and settling in the United States for married women meant that not only they would be reunited with their husbands, but this also gave them the opportunity for employment, thus a better life for their children. For young single women, permanent settlement in the U.S meant greater opportunities for education, employment, and the chance to become independent and escaping the pressures of marriage.

Many of the women interviewed considered family support as the main form of coping mechanism to deal with the absence of their partners. Family members were often available to help with the children, covering expenses when needed, and providing assistance during the absence of husbands. Moreover, women also mentioned socializing with other women as an effective form of stress management. Many of the women gathered together and braided *rebozos* on someone’s patio while they conversed amongst themselves. Other women kept busy by volunteering for school and church events.

**Application of Merton’s modes of adaptations**

As underlined in chapter two this study was not launched with an explicit attempt to test social science theory. However, it was anticipated that the works of
Merton and Agnew pertaining to how persons adapt to stress, would help frame the research. Strain was defined as: tension, anxiety, and or apprehension resulting from the migration of husbands and/or other relatives or friends.

Not all of Merton’s modes of adaptations appear to be directly applicable to the modes of adaptations of rural Mexican women. Nonetheless, some of the findings do fit Merton’s categories of adaptation.

**Conformists**

Mexican women interviewed in this study accepted the illegal crossing of their men folk to the United States as normal. Women, as well as, the community as a whole, rationalized the unlawful migration of its residents to the U.S. as an act of survival. Crossing the border in pursuit of employment to put food on the table of those back in México overweighs the risks of getting caught and persecuted as well as the dangers that such crossing entails. Because men have been crossing the border for several generations looking for employment to provide for their families, this usual and expected migration of the men in La Lomita has become the norm regardless of the fact that it is technically violating the law. The majority of the women interviewed therefore were “conformists” in the sense that they approved, accepted and encouraged the migration. To the extent that the women had totally accepted crossing the border as a normal and expected pattern of behavior, they must be seen as conforming to the culture of the research setting.

It can also be noted women of the village became “conformists” when they accepted, obeyed, and followed the values of traditional Mexican culture regarding gender roles and family. In small villages like La Lomita, women are predominately
mujeres de la case or women of the house. They take care of household chores and the children while the men are the breadwinners and heads of the family. These rural women are raised to be housewives and mothers. They are expected to learn how to keep a house, find a suitable husband, marry and have children. Attaining higher education or working away from the village is not encouraged. Most women interviewed conformed to these values and beliefs.

Innovators

Innovators would be those women who have rejected or refused to be left behind and have chosen to migrate to meet with their men-folk, even if that meant that they themselves would break the law. Increasingly, some women are migrating to the U.S. to be with their husbands. However, it is still infrequent, and is not encouraged when it is done illegally. This appears to be due to the dangers that such crossing involved for a women. The numerous stories of women being kidnapped, raped, or robbed when crossing the border have deterred most from taking the dangerous cross to the U.S. Innovators would be those women who decide to cross over to be with their husbands, taking advantage of the illegitimate means to get there (Coyote). Sometimes these women will cross over leaving their children behind with grandparents. The very few women in La Lomita that have done this become highly criticized for leaving their children behind.

Ritualists

Ritualists are those women who reject the idea of migrating to be with their husbands. While these women support the migration of their husbands they do not have any desire to travel abroad themselves, and believe that their role is to stay in
their hometown close to family and friends. These women have given up the
struggle to both migrate or to get ahead in their own Mexican society. They simply
concentrate on maintaining the continuous back-and-forth migration of their
husband to keep the family afloat.

Retreatists

Merton referred to such persons as social dropouts (1938). These women do
not become involved, or take part, in any community activities. They live behind
closed doors; trips to the city are almost nonexistent and they only have limited
contact with family. In La Lomita, these women were usually older women whose
children had migrated, settling permanently in the United States. These women,
along with their no longer migrating husband, had become “left behind” parents.
They did not show much care for what went on in the community and these women
lived a simple quiet and sheltered life.

Rebels

Compared to the conformists who accepted and followed village customs,
accepting the absence of a husband due to migration, as well as, accepting and
pursuing values and traditional roles for women, the rebels then become those
women who did not follow such traditional values. Instead, these women
substituted new goals and means for the original ones. For example, rebels could be
viewed as those few young women interviewed who left the village on their own.
These daring young women pursued higher education or sought employment in the
city, not abiding by the traditional norms that young girls were expected to follow in
the research setting. These women did not conform to the village custom expected
of young girls—remain in the village and seek marriage. Instead the objective for these women was to increase their education, or find sources of employment. The main goal for these women was to become independent and grow as individuals. The means to achieve such came through education and physically departing the village. While such behavior patterns are customary in many countries such as the United States, most young women at the research site are discouraged from chasing higher education, or working outside of their native village. Leaving the village to live on your own and finding employment is not frowned upon but many times these women become stigmatized by other women for such unexpected behavior.

**Application of Agnew’s General Strain Theory**

Agnew’s general strain theory speaks of the avoidance of painful or negative situations. He explains that painful or negative conditions include being confronted with the loss of positively valued stimuli or with the introduction of negative stimuli or stressors (Williams & McShane, 2010). He argues that the production of negative emotions such as anger and frustration, as well as, negative relationships can pressure individual towards crime (Agnew, 2001). Such arguments can clearly be applied to migrating males. For example, when migrating males return to the U.S. after a visiting to their Mexican communities, they sometimes cannot return to their previous jobs. The loss of employment then creates stress and frustration to the migrating male, which can lead this individual to deviant and/or or law-breaking behaviors. The loss of employment also creates strain for the wife back in México. Not having a job means that that migrant male cannot send money back to their families. Women back in México then become anxious as they worry about their
husband’s own stressed life, and the women then must find ways to manage their lives without regular funds from migrant husbands.

**Limitations**

First, this study was limited to only one rural village, and only thirty-five female residents participated in the study. A second limitation is that while data was gathered about how mothers perceived their children’s behavior regarding the absence of their fathers, no data was compiled directly from those children, as children were not interviewed.

**Directions for future research**

Future research should consider focusing on “left behind” children and their stresses and adaptations as they grow up with absent fathers. To examine how these children adapt to not having a father figure present throughout most of their childhood, and how that affects their childhood, would be of much importance as many of these children, especially the boys, will eventually cross over, just as did their fathers, for employment.

Likewise, attention should be given to the elderly individuals who are left behind. Many of these left behind individuals were once young migrants who worked abroad to provide for their families. Yet, at an old age they find themselves the ones who are left behind due to the settlement of their children in the United States. Also, consideration should be given to the role that that Catholic Church plays in the lives of these broken families. Most of the small rural villages in México have strong faith in the Catholic Church. Many of the community events and celebrations are religious, and in which most of the women participate.
Furthermore, future research should consider interviewing professionals and persons with authority in the community such as teachers, priests and the village’s delegado or deputy. Additionally, future research should emphasize women who have migrated, and who are now settled in the United States with their husbands and children. It would be relevant to explore how these women view their new life and if; in fact, it is viewed as better than remaining in México. Why would such be the case?

**Conclusion**

It appears that not only Mexican women of La Lomita have adapted to having husbands that come and go, but the women also support and even encourage the migration of their men as it has become synonymous with achieving a better life. Thus, the absence of their migrant husbands according to these women has become normal and customary in their life. However, this state, or view new view of normalness, still involves many hardships that the women have to endure. At the same time these women have become empowered by the absence of men.

Moreover, there is a clear disconnection between migrant fathers and their children. Children do not feel a bond with their fathers and at times develop resentment toward them. While there is an attempt to maintain unity within the family unit, out-migration appears to have influenced a slow breakdown of the concept of the Mexican family—one that has traditionally held strong values that promote family unification.

Furthermore, laws and policies have affected the lives of migrant families. Restrictive immigration policies and a rising anti-immigrant climate have prompted
longer periods of separation for migrants and their family back in México. Although these responses have not prevented migration between La Lomita and the United States, they have certainly made it more challenging and risky for migrants to return to their communities.

As the Hispanic population in the United States continues to grow, especially as a result of Mexican labor migration and immigration, a comprehensive understanding of their struggles becomes increasingly important, especially to criminologists interested in issues regarding undocumented immigrants and law enforcement policies.
References


Appendix A: Consent Form (English Version)

[The content of this consent form will be written in Spanish and read to case study candidates in the same language. If possible the notice will be read in the presence of a witness. After the reading of the document, the participant will sign two copies verifying that he understands the objectives of the study and that he is aware of the possible risks. The participant will keep one copy and the researcher the other one.]

Informed Consent Form

WHEN MEN LEAVE AL OTROL LADO (TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BORDER):
VOICES OF MEXICAN WOMEN

You are invited to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

The purpose of this study is to explore women’s perceptions regarding how they felt about, and adapted to, such unusual living situations where men are frequently away from home for long periods. Participation in the study by agreeing to be interviewed will take one or more sessions of about 60 minutes of your time. Audio recording of formal interviews will be conducted only when you have given the investigator permission to do so.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Also, if you find my presence at a certain social setting or my questions objectionable, you reserve the right to refuse information to me. If you chose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying the interviewer. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence. Your response will be considered only in combination with those from other participants. The information obtained in the study may be published in scholarly journals or presented in academic conferences but your identity will be strictly confidential.

The investigator, Linda Herrera, is not affiliated with the criminal justice system in the U.S. or in Mexico. The investigator is only studying perceptions of Mexican women who are left behind as part of the completion of her M.A. degree. In addition you should know that in all questions to you, it is emphatically stressed that no information will be asked or is desired that may identify any person or agency with illegal activity or wrongdoing both in the U.S. or in Mexico. Likewise, the migration status in the U.S. of any person that you may know will not be asked and is not wanted for this research.

There are no known risks associated with this research, however, before you choose whether or not you want to participate in this research I would like to inform you that any
information gathered about you in the course of this study will not be disclosed to anyone other than the researcher. Every precaution will be taken to record and file responses in such a way that you cannot be identified. Your name and address will not appear on field notebooks or journals, only pseudonyms or number codes will be used to identify you. In addition, all field data, informal interviews and participant-observation notes will be kept under lock and key. In regards to the audiotaped interviews: confidentiality of the information you provided will be maintained by immediately transcribing the interviews and replacing real names and addresses with pseudonyms. After the transcription, the information on the tapes will be erased.

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact the investigator and/or the faculty sponsor using the information listed below.

Investigator: Linda Herrera, M.A
Graduate Student
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Department of Criminology
wnln@iup.edu
Wilson Hall
Indiana, PA 15705

Thesis Adviser: Timothy Austin, Ph.D.
Professor
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Department of Criminology
Wilson Hall
Indiana PA, 15705
austin@iup.edu

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724 357 7730)
Voluntary Consent Form:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this Informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT): _____________________________________________

Signature: __________________________________________________________

Date: _____________________________________________________________

Phone number or location where you can be reached: ______________________

Best days and times to reach you: ______________________________________

Do you grant me permission to record interviews with you on audiotape?

_______ Yes  __________ No

Please sign below. Your signature is needed to show that you have given/not given permission to record interviews on audiotape.

Signature______________________________________   Date:

________________________________________

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

Date: _______________  Investigator’s Signature: _____________________________
Appendix B: Consent Form (Spanish Version)

Formulario de Consentimiento Informado

WHEN MEN LEAVE AL OTRO LADO (TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BORDER): 
VOICES OF MEXICAN WOMEN

Esta usted invitado a participar en este estudio de investigación. La información siguiente se proporciona para ayudarle a tomar una decisión informada sobre su participación. Si usted tiene alguna pregunta no dude en preguntarme.

El propósito de este estudio es explorar las percepciones de las mujeres con respecto a sus sentimientos y en como se adaptan a una situación de vida inusual, donde los hombres estan lejos de casa durante largos periodos de tiempo. La participación en el estudio al aceptar ser entrevistado podría implicar una o más sesiones de unos 60 minutos. Grabación de audio de entrevistas formales se llevará a cabo sólo cuando usted haya dado el permiso al investigador para hacerlo.

Su participación en este estudio es totalmente voluntario. Usted es libre de no participar en este estudio o retirarse en cualquier momento sin afectar negativamente su relación con el investigador. Su decisión no resultará en ninguna pérdida de beneficios. Por otra parte, si encuentra la presencia del investigador en algún lugar o sus preguntas desagradable, usted tiene todo el derecho de denegar información al investigador. Si usted decide participar, puede retirarse en cualquier momento tan solo con notificar al investigador. En su solicitud de retiro, se destruirá toda la información relativa a usted. Si usted decide participar, toda la información se cuidara en estricta confidencialidad. Su respuesta se considerará sólo en combinación con los de otros participantes. La información obtenida en el estudio puede ser publicada en revistas académicas o presentada en congresos académicos pero su identidad será estrictamente confidencial.

La investigadora, Linda Herrera, no está afiliada con el sistema de justicia penal en los Estados Unidos ni en México. La investigadora sólo estudia las percepciones de las mujeres mexicanas que quedan atrapadas mientras sus esposos trabajan en el extranjero. Esta investigación es parte de la terminación de la Maestria de la investigadora. Además, usted debe saber que en todas las preguntas dirijidas a usted, es enfáticamente recalcado que ninguna información se pedirá o se desea que puede identificar a cualquier persona o agencia con actividad ilegal o delito en los Estados Unidos o en México. Asimismo, el estatus de la migración en los Estados Unidos de cualquier persona que usted puede saber no se pedirá y no se desea para esta investigación.

No existen riesgos conocidos asociados con esta investigación, sin embargo, antes de elegir si desea participar en esta investigación me gustaría informarles que cualquier información recopilada sobre usted en el curso de este estudio no será revelada a nadie que no sea la investigadora. Se tomarán todas las precauciones necesarias a las respuestas de expediente y el archivo de tal manera que usted no podrá ser identificado. Su nombre
y dirección no aparecerá en los cuadernos de campo o revistas, sólo seudónimos o códigos de números se utilizarán para identificarte. Además, todos los datos de campo, entrevistas informales y notas de observación participante se mantendrá bajo llave. En cuanto a las entrevistas grabadas: se mantendrá la confidencialidad de la información que usted proporcione al inmediatamente transcribir las entrevistas y de igul manera se sustituyeran los nombres personales y direcciones con seudónimos. Después de la transcripción, se borrará la información grabada.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta sobre este estudio, puede contactar a la investigadora o al patrocinador/ profesor de la investigadora utilizando la siguiente información.

Investigadora: Linda Herrera, M.A
Graduate Student
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Department of Criminology
wnln@iup.edu
Wilson Hall
Indiana, PA 15705

Director de tesis: Timothy Austin, Ph.D.
Professor
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Department of Criminology
Wilson Hall
Indiana PA, 15705
austin@iup.edu

Este proyecto ha sido aprobado por la Junta de revisión institucional de Indiana University of Pennsylvania para la protección de sujetos humanos (teléfono: 724 357 7730)
Formulario de consentimiento voluntario:

He leído y entiendo la información en el formulario y doy mi consentimiento para voluntariamente participar en este estudio. Entiendo que mis respuestas son completamente confidenciales y que tengo el derecho de retirarme en cualquier momento. He recibido una copia sin firma de este formulario de consentimiento informado para tener en mi posesión.

Nombre (letra de molde): __________________________________________________________

Firma: __________________________________________________________

Fecha: __________________________________________________________

Número de teléfono o lugar donde se le puede llamar: __________________________

Horario preferable para contactarlo: __________________________

¿Me concede permiso para grabar entrevistas con usted en cinta grabada?

___ Sí ___ No

Por favor firmar a continuación. Su firma es necesaria para mostrar que me hayas dado/ no dado permiso para grabar entrevistas en audio.

Firma____________________________________ Fecha: __________________________

Certifico que se le a explicado a la persona sobre la naturaleza y propósito, los beneficios y posibles riesgos asociados con participar en este estudio de investigación, he respondido a las preguntas que han surgido y he sido testigos de la firma anterior.

Fecha__________________________ Firma del Investigador

____________________________
Appendix C: Map

![Map of Mexico with Guanajuato highlighted](https://maps.bing.com/)
Appendix D: Photos of Research Setting

Women during a community meeting

Woman washing clothes by hand in a *lavadero*
Women walking during a religious pilgrimage

Women plucking chickens
Young women working in a sewing workshop

A typical house in research setting