

/yik'oh sni7 me7el/
 'He married his mother-in-law.'

There are evidently men in /Na Cih/ who share a bed with both mother and daughter.

Finally, comments allude to people who either never got married at all, or who

'married very young.'

/te stuk/
 'He's all alone' (i.e., wifeless).

/c'abal yahnil/
 'He has no wife.'

No man, and few women, in Zinacantan can survive unmarried.⁹
 For a man to grow old without a wife is considered, at best, unnatural; and the widower is truly pitiable.

(b) Wealth/ Poverty

Several comments deal with obvious outward signs by which a Zinacanteco can know the nature of another man's economic state. Of rich men it is said:

/lagryo sna/
 'He has a brick house', or simply

'He has a new big house.'

Furthermore,

'He has a new molino.'

⁹
 For a most eloquent statement of the dependencies and tensions between husband and wife in Zinacantan see Laughlin (1962).

/7oy stokadisko/
'He has a record-player.'

Sometimes the attribution of wealth is accompanied by sinister suggestions:

/hk'uleh tahmek, 7olon staoh/
'He is very rich; he found his wealth in the lowlands,'
(i.e., by witchcraft).

Poverty may derive from laziness and mismanagement, or simply from bad luck. While one man is

/zinil ta 7il/
'tightly entwined by debts,'

another may

/mu 7altikuk spas yil/
'incur debts needlessly.'

And while the hapless farmer may

'work but never get ahead,'

another poor man may be

/c'ahc'ahtik/
'rather lazy'

or may trace his poverty to the fact that

/bat ta buruel stak'in/
'his money went to the bordello.'

(c) Temperament

We can induce aspects of the ideal personality from the temperamental failures of well-known citizens of /Na Cih/:

'He can't get along with his parents.'

/pukuhtik yo7on timi sa7bat shole/
'He is evil tempered if he is provoked.'

/tol stoy sba./
'He is haughty and self-important.'

Such comments as these are conversational prods to speculation about personality.

(d) Physical peculiarity

Bricker (1968) suggests that much humor in Zinacantan is based on violations of a cluster of norms having to do with "Self-Image" --- clothing, appearance, demeanor. People are certainly identified by their physical abnormalities, visible or invisible. Some residents of /Na Cih/ are obviously odd:

/zoziron/
'He is very hairy.'

/hup'em vinik/
'He is a fat man.'

/k'asem yok, tuc'em yok, koxo/
'He has a broken leg; his leg is cut off; he is lame.'

/makal xcikin/
'His ears are closed; (he is deaf).'

Other physical deficiencies may be the results of sickness or violence; they are no less laughable.

/staoh k'a7el, solel xtuet/
'She contracted rot; she became simply foul.'

/lahem ta bala snuti7al 7at/
'His scrotum was hit by a bullet.'

/tuc'bil 7at/
'He had his penis amputated.'

Zinacantecos do not hesitate to refer to a man's amputated limbs or malformed nose out of a regard for his sensibilities. Such distinguishing marks often inspire joking nicknames.

(e) Religious/ Civil Office

Most offhand remarks about cargo performance or term in civil office deal with failure --- through reluctance or inability --- to carry through the responsibilities of a job. Some never complete their terms at all:

'He had a broken term on the education committee.'

/7ituc' ta be/

'(His term as Presidente) was cut off midway.'

/c'ayem smartomoreyal/

'He lost his opportunity to be mayordomorey (first level religious cargo).'

/te toyel toyel batel yu7un/

'He kept putting off (his entry into a cargo).'

10

Other remarks highlight the incongruity between failure in ritual duties and respected old age.

/tol xvay ta totil-me7ilal/

'He sleeps too much when he is ritual adviser.'

/mol ta yec/

'He is an old man good for nothing,' (i.e., despite his age he never finished the cargo system or became a ritual advisor).

(f) Identity

The recent proliferation of possible occupations has enabled young Zinacanteco men to adopt non-traditional external identities. Men of Zinacanteco origin engage in activities which are alien and non-Indian.

10

Cancian (1965:183-184) points out that having waiting lists for cargo positions allows a man to sign up for a cargo far in the future, thus fulfilling the social demand to expend wealth on religious service, but avoiding the cargo itself though a convenient calendrical game.

'He has left /Na Cih/ and lives in Tuxtla.'

/soltaro lavie/

'He is now a soldier.'

/conolahel ta tuxa/

'He spends his time selling in Tuxtla.'

/7ayudante yu7un karo./

'He is an assistant to a trucker.'

/cofer/

'He is a driver.'

/mu xvay ta sna/

'(He spends so much time elsewhere that) he won't sleep at home.'

By contrast with such non-traditional Zinacantecos, there are those whose origins are in doubt.

/7ulo7 7onox/

'He is, in reality, a Chamula.'

/manat yu7un stot/

'He was bought by his father.'

/me7on c'iem/

'He grew up as an orphan.'

It is even now not unknown for a poor family to sell its children for cash to a wealthy family in need of an extra laborer. There are, in addition, a number of Chamulas who came to Zinacantan during a great famine (/ta vi7naltik/) and from neighboring ranches bought or commandeered through land-reform.

The remaining remarks from the /Na Cih/ Who's Who lists have to do with frequent jailing, with the gradual deterioration of a once strong man through drink, with men who claim to be curers but refuse to make a public debut, etc.

Comments which occurred in Who's Who sessions are incipient gossip. That is, they represent conversation starters --- lead-in remarks which demand amplification. Each contains the germ of a story. They are hints to the listener that there is much more to be told, if one could take time to gossip.

B. The Gossip

While it is a relatively straightforward task to arrange Who's Who categories and comments into rough topical groupings, it is not so easy to present the wide range of topics mentioned in all the gossip I heard in Zinacantan. In compiling an index, I abandoned some formal content analysis¹¹ in favor of a more flexible coding system.

Since the gossip I recorded was natural conversation, I was able to code not only subject matter (e.g., keep track of all gossip having to do with divorce, or with drunken behavior) but also certain other meta-linguistic variables. I marked exchanges as joking speech, as insult, or 'moralizing speech:' as bragging, or mocking, and so on. Similarly,

11

Bricker (1968) used the General Inquirer to index the Tzotzil humor texts she had gathered according to various ethnographic categories. For example, the cluster she calls the "Self-Image Complex" (1968:54) includes such categories as

Clothing, Filth, Awkwardness, Caught, Losing,
Violence, Drunkenness.

Her dictionary (according to which the computer scans text) might, for example, have assigned Tzotzil roots meaning 'drunk' and 'tipsy' to the category of Drunkenness.

Unfortunately Bricker's dictionary, though doubtless adequate for her purposes, was too restrictive for the range of material in the corpus of gossip. To create a suitable dictionary which included all appropriate categories would have been to survey the range of subjects in the whole corpus --- in short, to complete the content analysis.

In any case, I was unwilling to convert the voluminous texts and conversations I had recorded into a form suitable for the computer's maw.

I used certain frankly imposed categories to index statements of belief, statements about personality and temperament, accounts of supernatural events, and others; such categories facilitated later retrieval of stories which I had myself associated. I let my impressions themselves create a coding system with the help of a simple computerized routine.¹²

As I read and reread the gossip and divided it into discrete items, I associated with each story a set of ethnographic categories (topics) and meta-linguistics properties (e.g., 'lewd joking'); I also entered occurrences of certain Tzotzil expressions for later retrieval (see Chapter 7). By continually reexamining and collapsing the categories which resulted from this haphazard process I arrived finally at the subject-matter category list which appears in Appendix 3.

I cannot claim that the resulting categories resemble native behavioral domains (though nothing serious depends on such similarity; the index of stories is merely a convenient device for retrieval and exposition.) I put cases of wife-beating with other cases of wife-beating, instances of divorce with other instances of divorce, and so on.

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I am extremely indebted to George A. Collier and the Stanford Anthropology Department for making available their resources at the Stanford Computer Center, where I began the indexing of this material. Prof. Collier shared with me not only his house, his freezer, and his computer account number, but also his knowledge of the powers of the editing language WYLBUR.

Stories in which similar things happen are grouped together
 under a heading which represents that sort of happening. ¹³

But two instances of what I called aggressive female behavior (e.g., a woman who seeks a lover, and a girl who actively solicits a fiance) may not strike a native as at all the same sort of thing.

The unevenness of the gossip collection further complicates the coding system. Stories which I elicited in conversation with a lone Zinacanteco (for example, those bearing G- and H- prefixes --- see Appendix 1) may be incompletely transcribed and imperfectly understood; they cannot be compared with full transcripts of Who's Who gossip sessions. Moreover, two minute stories are hardly comparable to two-hour accounts of complicated events; though my index counts each as single units.

Figure 6 shows the twenty most common gossip subjects, listed by frequency of occurrence in both Who's Who stories and those collected in other ways. Note that a single story may figure in more than one category; for example, a story in which a woman divorces her habitually drunken husband might contribute to both categories one and two (drunkenness and divorce.) Figure 6 shows all topics which occur

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Furthermore, I profited unhesitatingly from categorizations of behavior implied by Jane Collier's categories of disputes (1970), and Bricker's humor themes (1968). I am to blame for any misuse of their findings.

in five percent or more of the (roughly one thousand) stories in the corpus.

Figure 6.1 shows further gossip subjects which occur with notable frequency in either Who's Who gossip or other gossip, but not both.

It will be useful to see the sorts of stories Zinacantecos tell about some of these frequent conversational topics.

(1) Drunkenness

It would be easy to select from conversational texts all passages having to do with drunkenness by cueing the root /yak/ (which occurs, for example, in /-yakub/ ('get drunk')) and a few others. The category is unambiguous, and the topic is omnipresent: thirteem stories out of a hundred contain at least a reference to some sort of drunken behavior. Consider the following stories.

Several drunk men terrorized an innocent tourist who had the misfortune to stray into a Zinacanteco village off the Pan-American highway. The ladino authorities dragged the drunken offenders from their beds in retaliation, taking them pantless to the jail. (E 38)

A woman curer is known as a heavy drinker when she cures; when drunk she rants and raves, and has even been known to curse the Saints. (E 55)

A man is so accomplished at sewing the traditional style hats that he could surely support himself at this trade were it not for his propensity to drink. Sometimes he will sew an entire hat for the payment of just one litre of liquor. (E 93)

Figure 6
Most common gossip themes

Subject	Number of stories in Who's Who	Number in other gossip	Total
1. drunkenness, drinking and drunken behavior	64	68	132
2. divorce, child support	69	42	111
3. illicit sexual relations, incest, fornication	68	48	116
4. jail, other punishment	66	35	101
5. wealth, poverty	52	38	90
6. kin disputes	45	45	90
7. courtship, courtship disputes	33	46	79
8. adultery	34	40	74
9. fighting, beating	44	28	72
10. stealing, embezzlement	41	29	70
11. cargo performance, cargo failure	36	32	68
12. <u>cabildo</u> scenes, other dispute settlement	32	40	72
13. witchcraft	48	19	67
14. promiscuity, womanizing	32	31	63
15. scolding, quarrelling	37	24	61
16. sickness and death	24	30	54
17. curing practices, curing powers	35	20	55
18. marriage disputes	33	21	54
19. murder	36	18	54
20. fleeing, running away	22	28	50

A man recently died in Hot Country after falling into a river while stone drunk. (E 106)

Conversation is scattered with remarks like

/baz'i lek xa7i pox le7e/
('He really likes his liquor.')

and observations about a man's drinking habits, even when stories are not explicitly about the consequences of drinking and drunkenness.

(2) Divorce

Zinacantecos talk a lot about divorce: the circumstances leading to it, and its terms --- including the provisions for child custody and support. (Because of the vaguely genealogical flavor of Who's Who discussions, this topic may have been unnaturally frequent in them.) Some gossip is about quite particular cases.

The son of a powerful man divorced his first wife. The husband's family thought the girl was too lazy: she wouldn't get up early to grind corn for her husband's tortillas; she spent too much time at her parents' home. The woman was sent packing with her child.
(E 98)

A man abandoned his wife and child to take up with a mistress. Since the marriage had included a civil ceremony --- and was thus listed on official municipio records --- the wife went to San Cristóbal to demand a civil divorce and support for her children. The man was jailed for not producing the money, and he eventually made up with his wife and returned to her.
(E 135)

Other gossip relating to divorce has to do with the habits of people while divorced (bereft men, sitting in a fireless house; gay divorced women seeking multitudes of lovers, etc.). And the following story is about a divorce-monger.

Figure 6.1

Additional frequent subjects in Who's Who and other gossip

Frequent Who's Who topics

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
borrowing & lending	36
factional disputes (including land disputes)	33
troublemaking, /-sa7 k'op/	30
past times, past events	28
miscellaneous violence	25

Frequent non- Who's Who gossip topics

rape	34
nicknames	26

An old woman used to serve frequently as a mediator between married people having fights. But she tended to encourage the woman not to make up with her husband and, instead, to seek divorce. She fanned the flames of disputes. (E 21)

(3) Illicit sexual relations

This category includes stories of sexual relations between unmarried people, or incest. (Adultery, having slightly different legal consequences, is listed as category 8 --- also quite frequent.)

A cargoholder was chagrined when his daughter was caught fornicating with a sacristan while she was supposed to be washing the clothes of a saint image. (E 139)

A notorious witch is reputed to have screwed his own mother in front of a cave in which he had performed witchcraft ceremonies --- this in order to render his spells especially potent. (E 172)

A man was glimpsed having intercourse with an unknown girl in a dry creek-bed. Passers-by pelted him with rocks. (E 467)

Zinacantecos felt that sexual mores were degenerating.

While in past times unmarried boys and girls could be whipped merely for talking to one another, according to a man from Zinacantan Center nowadays one frequently comes upon couples embracing in the shelter of trees and bushes near paths. Gossip turned so often to illicit sexual relations during the Who's Who sessions that the panel coined a new euphemism for intercourse: /-ak' 7inyeksyon/ (literally: 'give injections.')

(4) Jail, and other punishment

Most every gossip story about a public dispute ends with

the jailing of one of the principals. There are other sorts of punishment:

A man had planned to enter an expensive and prestigious first level cargo. However, because he beat his wife so often, he was made into a /mayol/ by the Presidente. (A /mayol/ is a very low prestige first-level cargo, but its duties amount to little more than serving as errand boy and occasionally as policeman at the service of townhall officials.) (E 159)

A man and a woman caught as adulterers were not only given jail terms but also were forced to perform public labor clearing the waterways of Zinacantan Center during a large fiesta when crowds gathered to watch and mock them. (E 86)

(5) Wealth and Poverty

Much gossip is devoted to the acquisition and outward manifestations of wealth. Similarly, gossips often cluck their tongues over the loss of wealth and the hardships endured by the poverty-stricken.

A wealthy man claims to have started out as a poor farmer. He got his first money from distilling cane liquor and "taking money from drunks." He and his wife went to the church in Zinacantan Center and prayed to San Lorenzo for wealth. In a dream the wife saw herself before a woman inside the church who handed her a bag full of gold coins. From that moment, the man claims, he has prospered. (E 96)

The son of a wealthy man, who used to own a 'ranch' with cattle and horses squandered all his money on whores in Tuxtla after his father died. He is now poverty stricken. (E 294)

A man who has for a long time claimed to be sick, and who walks with a limp, is so poor that he sometimes goes to Tuxtla to beg. (E 151)

A woman from /Nabencauk/ was divorced by her husband and faced the prospect of raising three children with no means of support. She sold one of her sons to work as a mozo (indentured laborer) in San Cristóbal, and used that money to survive. (E 323)

Zinacantecos believe that acquiring wealth requires diligent work, good luck, and piety. Extreme poverty, on the other hand, is most often due to laziness and dissipation; Zinacantecos take the selling of children or property as a sign of desperation induced by lack of money.

(6) Kin disputes

Jane Collier (1970:137ff.) characterizes public legal disputes between kinsmen as "expressable in terms of property." She distinguishes three general categories:

"Problems that arise between a boy and his guardians or parents," (pp. 139-141)

"Disputes between siblings," (pp. 141-144) and

"Problems that arise over property held by women." (pp. 144-146)

Though conflicts between kinsmen may ultimately take the form of property disputes if they reach the townhall, gossip is able to dig more deeply into the motivations of kin conflict and its immediate manifestations.

Two men from different hamlets who share a common grandfather were cooperating in the building of a house in Zinacantan Center to be used by members of the family and friends for their cargos. One man, the owner of the land in question, had lent money to the other; when the money was not repayed in time the two men quarrelled. The first man calculated how much his cousin had contributed to the building of the house; he deducted this amount from the other's debt and henceforward excluded the other from use of the new house. (E 184)

A respected old man is estranged from his daughter. His sons, after marriage, all moved out leaving him only 2 daughters. He invited the elder girl's fiancé to come live in his house compound in order to have

another man there to work with him, etc. But the boy also crept into bed with the man's youngest daughter and deflowered her. The old man married the youngest girl off immediately in an inferior match; and he threw out the offending son-in-law. But the first daughter, longing for her husband, finally herself abandoned her aged father and went to live with the husband. Now the old man has hardened his heart against the daughter and will no longer speak to her. (W 96)

I have also included gossip about disputes between a man and his in-laws under the category of kin disputes.

A young man who quarrelled with his father-in-law over the performance of his new bride has recently tried several times to implicate his father-in-law in theft. He accuses the old man of having gotten him drunk and stolen a one-thousand peso bill from him. Everyone agrees, however, that the story is a lie concocted "so that he could get his father-in-law jailed". (E 368)

A man who had moved in with his wife and his widowed mother-in-law after his marriage argued so much with the old woman that she eventually moved out, even though the land was hers. "He couldn't live in the same house with her so he drove her out." (E 258)

(7) Courtship and courtship disputes

Most gossip about courtship has to do with broken courtships requiring court settlement. (Cf. Jane Collier (1970:Ch. X.)) One informant told me with great glee about the troubles that a respected elder in /Na Cih/ had over his son's courtships. The first son lost his fiancée to an interloper after several years of courtship; then the second son himself broke up another courtship and was forced to marry the girl and pay back the injured suitor's expenses. (N 4 and N 6). Both cases were ultimately settled at the town hall with great scandal.

The gossip covers a range of events that did not necessarily end at the cabildo. In one story the bad performance of a suitor had drastic consequences.

A boy had asked for the hand of a fierce old man's daughter. He was accepted as a suitor, but the girl's family were not pleased with the boy's evident poverty or the fact that he had no hat (or other proper young man's furnishings.) The boy went down to Hot Country with a bottle to get in the good graces of his future father-in-law and brothers-in-law, who were working there. But the others turned on him and murdered him by throwing him off the mountain side. (E 57)

In other cases the suitor is simply rejected outright.

A man whose mother was known to be evil-tempered had a hard time getting a second wife after his first wife divorced him. He approached one girl, but her family refused to let her go off "only to be scolded, only to be scorned and beaten" by the boy's mother. (E 374)

A boy born in a now abandoned hamlet had difficulty finding a wife. Girls mocked him saying "this is not your hamlet; you cannot take a wife from here." (E 169)

The gossip also includes: stories in which a boy and girl elope, thereby denying the girl's family of its rightful bride-price; cases in which a prospective bride flees marriage at the last minute; cases in which a boy abandons a courtship (when he hears that his fiancée has "gotten injections from another" or when he tires of the expense); and stories of excessive bride-price (one man even charged interest on a delayed bride payment for his daughter). Very rarely does gossip touch on courtship which seemed outwardly successful.

One of an old man's several daughters was considered remarkable because she, of all her sisters, /tuk' inupun/ ('got married correctly.') (W 96)

(8) Adultery

Gossip about adultery is by far the most frequent sort of gossip about married couples. Jane Collier (1970) states the legal position regarding charges of adultery as follows:

"Both husband and wife are expected to remain faithful in marriage and for either partner to have a lover is grounds for divorce. While accusations of adultery can be discussed and dismissed in the hamlets, the case will go to the town hall if the accused is not proved innocent. Unlike cases of ordinary wife beating, accusations of adultery imply claims on property when a husband is at fault, and jailing when the wife is in the wrong..." (p. 162)

Gossip about adultery does not wait for a husband or wife to make a public complaint. Furthermore, there is no doubt about the bias in men's gossip about adultery: a cuckold is made foolish by his adulterous wife; a man committing adultery is simply following his natural impulses (can you blame him if he is a man?), even if he wrongs his wife in the process.

A man who spends considerable time in Tuxtla working as a bricklayer's apprentice is mocked for not visiting his wife more often. Everyone suspects, though, that the woman gets a bit of sexual satisfaction on the side; her husband can't know about such adultery "because it doesn't leave marks the way, say, sandals do." (E 51)

A woman once asked her neighbor to help her fix up the corn bin while her husband was away. She then complained to the visitor about her husband's lack of ingenuity and pluck. The neighbor, seeing his opportunity, offered to take care of her in still more ways, and the woman agreed. She made arrangements to leave her door open at night; and he told his wife that he had to go out to make a deal with a truck owner about having corn delivered. The adulterous liason went on for some time until the man was spotted climbing into his neighbor's window. (E 228)

A powerful elder has an illegitimate child, product of an adulterous union from his youth. He had approached an old man about borrowing a horse; the old man sent his daughter along to help catch the animal. The girl, once they were out in the woods, solicited the man's attentions, and finally he agreed to oblige her. Later the girl kept pestering the man despite the fact that he had a wife; when she got pregnant she charged that he had raped her. He denied it and related the whole story, defending his action before the Presidente saying, "Would you refuse such a gift?" He made up with his wife, and simply gave money to have his child raised. (W 111)

(9) Fighting, beating

Casual observation in Zinacantan would reveal little overt violence; only drunks are sufficiently uninhibited to punch each other. This is not to say that ambushes and sober fights do not occur.

The hamlet principal was walking near the gate of a girl who was known to have several lovers. Suddenly a group of men jumped out of the bushes, beat him up, and stole some money from him. He accused several boys later, but all agreed that the leader was probably Antun, the girl's most jealous lover. (E 162)

Two well-known witches once got into a fight. One hit the other about three times. The beaten man then threatened to kill the other by witchcraft, but nothing happened. "Perhaps their powers are equal." (E 181)

Two brothers have long been fierce enemies. "They almost bite each other when they meet on the path." (E 253)

Still, men rarely come to blows; aggression is usually covert, as when a man resorts to secret witchcraft. Thus, it is always news when two men square off and begin to hit (or, more accurately, push).

(10) Stealing

Not all theft is punished by the town hall; in fact, few petty thieves are caught in the act, and there is usually no way to prove theft after the fact.

A young man is now known as 'Turkey Thief'. He used to round up his neighbor's turkeys, put them in a white flour sack, and carry them to Tuxtla to sell. He was discovered when an old lady neighbor went searching for a turkey that had strayed into the corn field; she looked in his house and couldn't see anything because her turkey was inside a bag hanging from the rafters. But she heard it, and the boy was made to pay. (E 243)

An Agente from /Nabencauk/ was removed from office and forced to flee after it was discovered that he had embezzled left over funds from various fiesta taxes and school levies and spent the money himself. He eventually returned about 1000 pesos, though rumor has it that he stole considerably more. (E 297)

As I mentioned above, a few old women and lazy young men have reputations for light-fingeredness: they pick up clothes set out to dry on house compound fences, grab fruits from other peoples' yards, steal squash as they walk through cornfields. Other men steal more systematically.

A good-for-nothing man (who used to take his whole family to visit his father, when he knew the old man would be eating, just to be given a free meal) hired himself out as a laborer when his father was harvesting corn. But instead of picking all the corn he saw, he left a considerable amount on the plants; later he went back to collect what was left for himself. (W 134)

Another good-for-nothing married a clever woman who had her own money. He forced her to lend him large sums of money which he squandered on his own projects --- lending to enhance his prestige, buying a liquor still, building a large brick house with a lock on the door --- never repaying a centavo. He walks around in a warm woolen tunic, but he bought it with money stolen from his wife. (E 377, W 122)

Thus, despite the fact that relatively few cases of theft come before the Presidente, the idiom of 'stealing' (Tzotzil root /*elk'*/) is frequently used in describing unearned gain.

(11) Cargo performance and failure.

Because of the general interest in cargo affairs much conversation has to do with the schedule of office holding, the identities of future cargo holders, and so on. Such conversations are neutral; they concern matters of fact unevaluated.

The cargo system contributes to more highly-charged gossip when a man's performance --- good or bad --- comes under scrutiny. Gossip recounts how men fail to enter their cargos on time because of wrongdoing or insufficient funds; it scorns men for incomplete cargo service, for leaving their cargos in the middle, or for serious misconduct in office. The cargo system gives rise to gossip about other peculiar situations.

An extremely old man has asked for a first-level cargo. Everyone considers it odd, indeed, that he should begin his service so late. (E 28)

People laugh about the apparent fact that in the whole hamlet of /7Elan Vo7/ nearly no one has passed any cargo except the low-ranking /mayol/, the Presidente's errand boys. (W 6)

(12) Cabildo scenes, dispute settlement

Figure 6 shows that more than 7% of the stories in the gossip corpus include accounts of formal dispute settlement

either by hamlet elders or at the town hall. Many stories, that is, have to do with events which ultimately lead actors to conflict that must be formally resolved; the gossip includes the settlement as part of the story.

(13) Witchcraft

Gossip about witchcraft dwells first on different techniques for sending sickness and death. People are interested in the details of petitions to the Earth Lord to exchange souls for wealth, and in the ghoulish remnants of witchcraft ceremonies found in caves or dug up in the cemetery. Zinacantecos are fascinated, horrified and amused all at once by stories like the one in which a witch has intercourse with his own mother to make his spells irreversible (W 77). There is a morbid, half-joking narrative style which characterizes accounts of supernatural powers.

"People just say that he goes out at night and becomes a goat." (W 152)

"Carajo!"

"That's what I hear, that he has distinct habits."

"Something of a witch, eh?"

"Right. He turns himself into a goat, and then wanders about on the path. He has frightened lots of people there near his house, I hear."

"But how did the people see him? Did he just transform himself while they were watching?"

"I guess that they saw allright."

"While they are just this far away, why then he just comes at them shaking his whiskers and his furry hide from side to side..."

"Aha!"

"... and then when he gets up close; 'Bee ti bee ti bee bee,' he says. He stamps his front hoof."

"Indeed!"

"And if they try to get him --- if they've brought their shotguns, or if they have machetes perhaps, they say to themselves, 'Let's see if he can be hurt at all...' But that old goat refuses to be hurt. He just goes on terrifying people. That's why they call the old man 'the Goat'."

Another large segment of witchcraft gossip is concerned to pin the blame for individual cases of sickness and death on particular witches. Circulating the rumor that a particular man is a successful witch helps Zinacantecos to know which witches are dangerous enough to avoid, and which only give empty threats.

During an argument a self-confessed witch said to his opponent: "We'll see how things turn out tonight or tomorrow" --- a veiled threat of witchcraft. His opponent replied: "If you really know how to do it, go ahead, eat (me, my soul) if you have no meat of your own." But no harm came to the man who had quarreled

with the witch, leading others to speculate that he is not a witch, but just "says so with his mouth."
(E 118, W 53)

And sometimes during gossip sessions Zinacantecos speculate about the credibility of alleged witchcraft phenomena.

"/Kere/, don't you believe that there are witches! No, sickness comes by itself." (W 148)

"That's what I say, too: that sickness comes of its own accord. Sickness is ubiquitous."

"I don't believe in witches; they exist according to curers, but I say that is one of their lies. (Ha ha ha)."

"Well, okay, but --- you see we all contract sickness. As for witches, they just torment us; we just get sick from them. But we don't die of it. We will only die one day when sickness comes and, well, we die. But that is according to the command of Our Lord."

"Yes, that is how it is. If we have only a small time, if our destinies are not long, then if we have contracted enemies and at the same time get sick, well then we conclude that we have been witched."

"Ah, yes, that's what we say..."

"Even if it isn't true..."

(14) Promiscuity, womanizing

In some moods Zinacantecos will claim that sexual

moderation is desirable; that husband and wife ought to remain faithful to one another; that promiscuity is bestial, dog-like. Yet a high percentage of gossip has to do with loose women (whom I have arbitrarily labelled 'promiscuous') and insatiable men (whom I have called 'womanizers'.) The metaphor of 'giving' pervades descriptions of the sexual act.

When a notorious woman was first divorced she 'gave freely', it didn't matter where or to whom. She 'made a gift of it' to other people. "She went to be doctored elsewhere, got lots of injections." (E 50)

A man is ridiculed for divorcing his wife to marry his mistress. "But she wasn't only his mistress; she had lots of masters. She gave alms to any man who wanted." (E 130)

Men with insatiable sexual appetites are likely to suffer from their propensity for /zak-7anzile/ ('woman grabbing'); whereas promiscuous girls are labelled /loko/ (literally: 'crazy').

"And after he told me how he had seduced old Petul's wife I said to him, 'But you are just a wicked old fucker, compadre.'

"'Ahh, but I am a man,' he replied. (Ha ha ha)."
(W 100)

During gossip sessions Zinacantecos are eminently able to conceal their own past histories and join in moral speculation. (One of the men who gossiped most actively about

the sexual exploits of others is reputed to be the father of at least ten illegitimate children!) Similarly, dispute settlers may not practice what they preach.

An ex-Presidente was mocked for being self-righteous while on the bench. He would say to rapists and adulterers: "/Putá/, but what kind of behavior is that?" But he had his own wicked tendencies, and was beaten once by the mother of a girl he had violated. (W 142)

A man with two wives may ridicule the sexual appetites of his neighbor who has three.

There is a considerable native theory about sexual desire. 'Itchy' women are supposed to have red-colored bugs in their pubic hair. It is considered natural for young women to have as much curiosity about sexual contact as young men.

Several eligible young women of /Nabencauk/ have failed to attract suitors. People worry that if no young men appear to ask for their hands properly, their "heads may stop functioning" and they will search out lovers in secret. (G 85)

Old women are considered to retain sexual sensitivity until their sexual organs shrink away.

People joke about an old old woman who was recently raped while tending sheep. Her son asked her, 'Did you see who it was?' 'It was Cep,' she replied. 'How was it?' 'It was enough, it was enough,' said the old woman. (W 83)

(15) Scolding, quarrelling

A feature of all conflict and dispute is the verbal dueling and skillful scolding of which Zinacantecos are capable. Special words appear in scolding, and occasionally a man will be moved to speak in couplets when he rails against

another. Laughlin (n.d.) distinguishes the speech categories of "Scolding speech" and "Denunciatory speech", the former being an informal mode "used characteristically when one wishes ... to upbraid another" and the latter being the use of formal couplet speech "in self-righteous declamations at home or at the courthouse." (p. 22) I assigned gossip stories which included bits of indirectly quoted scolding to this relatively large category.

The remaining categories listed in Figure 6 are largely self-explanatory. Stories of 'sickness and death' (Category 16) have to do with the circumstances of illness, especially fatal illness. Gossip takes special interest in venereal disease ('rot') and in the loss of life force engendered by extremely violent sexual intercourse (called "losing one's /con/ ('animal')"). Category 17 contains stories having to do with curing ritual, the curing powers of certain individuals, and even a few recipes for potions to cure exotic diseases. (Story W 38 contains a long discussion of how to make an aphrodesiac.) Category 18, 'marriage disputes', contains all stories about marital discord except cases of adultery: wife beating, husband scolding, sexual incompatibility. Category 19 includes stories of murder or attempted murder. Finally, Category 20 includes stories in which people run away: from their hamlets, or from Zinacantan, to escape punishment or avoid marriage or cargos. (See Appendix 3 for a list and descriptions of all the topic categories which figure in the gossip corpus.)

The topic frequency lists give some evidence of the effect of different gossip contexts on subject matter. How might one explain the divergent frequencies of certain topics between Who's Who gossip sessions and other gossip collected at random from natural and textual sources? Figure 7 shows just such divergent frequencies; the first sixteen topics are much more common in Who's Who sessions than in the other material I collected. In cases where topics are more common in non-Who's Who gossip than in Who's Who gossip (categories 17 - 19 in Figure 7), certain highly contingent facts biased the figures. The emphasis on rape, for example, derives from the large number of rape stories about inhabitants of Zinacantan Center, all relayed to me by one man! The same man also had a high interest in promiscuous women; and, it happens, his father was at present widowed and searching without much success for a new wife.

The Who's Who gossip, on the other hand, seems to typify conversation between fairly successful, high-ranking men. (The gossip in these sessions was certainly less constrained by the presence of an anthropologist than was what I could hear (overhear) in the field. The men did not feel obliged to explain everything to me or to rely on me as interlocutor. Yet they were used to my presence.) Thus, Who's Who conversations reflect current events, notably public disputes (of the sort that result in town hall hearings) and factional disputes. The men who participated on Who's Who panels were

Figure 7
Strongly divergent frequencies between Who's Who and other
gossip topics.

Topic	Who's Who	Other
1. jail, punishment	66	35
2. witchcraft	48	19
3. murder	36	18
4. borrowing and lending	36	11
5. factions	33	7
6. troublemaking	30	13
7. past times	28	4
8. ladino law	22	11
9. talking saints	20	3
10. civil office	18	1
11. good man, or good in appearance only	16	4
12. wife beating	15	5
13. lewd joking	14	4
14. knowledge of Spanish	11	3
15. embezzling public funds	9	1
16. violent arrest	7	1
17. rape	13	34
18. wifeless/ husbandless	6	13
19. womanizing	4	11

generally wealthy, intelligent, successful, and --- within Zinacantan --- liberal minded. They were in a position to know about men who lend and men to whom one oughtn't lend (category 4); to know the discrepancy between reputation and actual character (category 11); to have ideas about the advantages and disadvantages of knowledge of Spanish (category 14) or of ladino legal institutions (category 8), and so on. Talk on such themes requires not only a willing but a knowledgeable audience.

The men in Who's Who sessions had nothing to do but talk; they could enjoy themselves in typical Zinacanteco fashion. Thus, they joked freely. And older men tended to reminisce about past times, events and customs of their childhoods. It would be useful to be able to predict --- from context and from the identities of participants --- what topics might emerge from a given gossip session. These results suggest, though far from conclusively, that Zinacantecos, like Americans, have favorite gossip topics and idiosyncratic fascinations. Some things are simply fun to talk about, if only we can find someone suitable to talk with.

I have sampled the most common gossip themes to arm the reader for considering the following hypothesis: the ability to gossip is a general manifestation of cultural competence (i.e., the knowledge one has of a culture) and, hence as a corollary, the collected gossip of a community contains the germ of the ethnography of the place. I shall

be concerned in the last three chapters of this thesis with the ramifications of such a hypothesis for the theory of ethnography.

Consider first the relationship between the thematic concentrations of gossip and the results of other ethnographic analyses of similar topics.¹⁴ Do people gossip about the same sorts of things which cause conflict and result in legal settlements? Do they gossip and joke about the same topics? Does the set of 'values' implicit in gossip resemble the 'norms' which other researchers have found in Zinacantan?

Victoria Bricker (1968: Ch. 4) isolates "two main humor complexes" in Zinacantan. She defines the complexes in terms of "cultural categories" as follows:

<p>"Class I: <u>Self-Image Complex</u> CLOTHING FILTH (of body or clothing) AWKWARDNESS (i.e., stumbling, falling down) CAUGHT (i.e., tied up, limbs imprisoned) LOSING (when it appears with CLOTHING, refers to loss of articles of clothing) VIOLENCE (hitting, beating, fighting) DRUNKENNESS</p>	<p>Class II: <u>Male-Female Relations Complex</u> MARRIAGE LUST (illicit intercourse, seduction) EFFICACY (when it appears with MARRIAGE or LUST, refers to sexual prowess) EXCHANGE (when it appears with MARRIAGE or LUST, refers to exchanging women) VIOLENCE (hitting, fighting, beating) DECEIT (lying, tricking) DRUNKENNESS" (p. 54)</p>
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14

This will not be a fair test since my work in the field benefitted from the previous ethnographic work of Jane Collier on law, and of Victoria Bricker on humor. I freely acknowledge that in creating the category system by which I 'counted' gossip themes I drew heavily on organizational principles these other researchers developed for their own work. Since I base comparison between, e.g., the things people gossip about and the things they joke about on individual stories, however, the interdependence of sorting categories is only tangentially a problem.

Bricker found that the norms governing these ethnographic categories were "implicit in the deviant behavior which Zinacantecos seem to regard as humorous." (p. 52) That is, Zinacantecos are most likely to laugh at people who fumble the rules for maintaining self image or to ridicule deviance from the standards governing the relations between men and women.

The reader has no doubt come to understand that most gossip in Zinacantan is funny, at least to Zinacantecos, and that gossip sessions are occasions of laughter and joking. It would be comforting, then, if the humor complexes Prof. Bricker describes were familiar to us as students of Zinacanteco gossip. In fact, the humorous complex having to do with male-female relations seems to lend itself well to gossip; consider the frequent gossip topics of divorce, illicit sexual relations, courtship problems, adultery, promiscuity, marriage disputes, and rape.

As for the Self-Image complex, gossip seems at least to be looking nearby. A few stories mention clothing deficiencies as a device to highlight other objectionable qualities a person may have.

"I said to the girl, 'Well, won't you marry Petul since he was the first to ask for your hand?' (H 74)

"'Why should I bother to sew up his rotten pants for him?' she replied. 'Do you think that's the kind of man I

want? He has barely covered his asshole. I want a good man, one who wears his pants a bit longer.' (Ha ha ha)

"Because that guy just wore his pants right up to here... He really had to squeeze himself in..."

Gossip emphasizes the deviant actions which accompany drunkenness rather than the foolish, mud-stained image of the drunk. Bricker finds that drunkenness is the object of humor insofar as consumption of alcohol is an "obstacle to the Zinacanteco's desire to present himself with demeanor in public." (1968:76)

Similarly, fighting and beatings create juicy gossip just as drunken brawls engender laughter. (Bricker (1968:79).) Fights prompt gossip especially when they mark pre-existing hostilities or some inherently scandalous underlying situation, e.g., adultery.

Nonetheless, gossip is not simply concerned with the demeanor and physical state of individuals in the way Bricker describes for Zinacanteco joking. A large component of joking takes place in contexts where the most available source for a good put-down is appearance or demeanor: the musician who mocks a drunken cargoholder (and thus reprimands him) during a ceremony is joking, but not gossiping. And gossip growing out of the incident emphasizes not simply

Jane Collier (1970) categorizes conflict leading to legal battles; I have extracted her categories in Figure 8. Again, since gossip draws heavily on the public scandal which flows from townhall court cases, it would be reassuring if conflict categories resembled gossip themes.

It should be clear from inspection that there is a close parallel between what Zinacantecos find interesting to gossip about and what they find worth fighting about.¹⁵ We know that gossip often deals explicitly with townhall settlements and with the jailing that follows a dispute. Gossip precedes the courthouse; gossips may be aware of a dispute and its causes before a public conflict erupts. The corpus of gossip contains stories on each of the conflict themes Collier lists. Indeed, Collier reports some famous cases which enjoyed municipio-wide notoriety; these stories reappeared almost word for word in Who's Who gossip sessions. For example, she

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Neither Dr. Collier nor I, so far as I can tell, tried to organize cases or gossip stories on the basis of some native Zinacanteco classificatory scheme. Hence, while I have a 'drunkenness' category, for example, Dr. Collier associates 'drunken insults' with aggression and 'drunken destructiveness' with neighbor disputes --- on the basis of the rules called up to justify settlements of the corresponding disputes. It would be possible, though tedious, for an informant to sort gossip stories or law cases by 'similarity' and thus to exhibit whatever native classificatory dimensions there may be for organizing such things. I cannot claim to have made such an experiment.

Figure 8: Categories of Conflict (based on Jane Collier (1970))

1. Witchcraft
 - witches who send sickness by themselves
 - witches who ask for sickness
 - witches who perform specific actions
(e.g., candle cutting, burying meat, etc.)
 - supernatural powers of witches
 - talking saints
 - petitions to the Earth Lord
 - /7ok'itabil camel/ ('sickness called down
by crying')
2. Aggression
 - threats of witchcraft or murder
 - false accusations
 - drunken insults
 - fighting
 - beatings
 - causing sickness (e.g., by frightening)
 - rape
 - forcible entry
 - theft
 - attempted murder
 - murder
 - malicious curing (hastening death of
patients)
3. Kin disputes
 - boy versus guardian or parents
 - disputes between siblings
 - disputes regarding women's property
4. Marital disputes
 - wife beating
 - adultery
 - divorce
5. Courtship disputes
 - breaking a courtship
 - elopements
 - third person interference in courtship
6. Disputes between
 - debt
 - neighbors
 - unfulfilled curing contract
 - damage to person (by non-relative)
 - damage to property
 - accidental damage to property
 - intentional damage --- theft
 - unintentional damage --- drunken des-
tructiveness
 - long-term neighbor fights

lists as a case of 'wrongs against the community' the story of a trip to lowland caves by a group of men who wanted to exchange 'half the population of /Nabencauk/' for wealth from the Earth Lord. (J. Collier (1970: case 43, pp. 213-214).)

It seems clear that the gossip corpus points to areas of Zinacanteco life which are interesting enough to talk about. What comes up in gossip parallels cases at the town-hall, behavior that Zinacantecos ridicule. I suggest that the implicit subject of gossip is rules, somehow understood, underlying proper Zinacanteco behavior.

16

Recent research on 'norms' in Zinacantan by Francesca Cancian (n.d.) suggests that the qualities associated with the Good Man form four 'clusters'. They are, roughly,

- (i) Leader (able to settle disputes, good talker, etc.)
- (ii) Religious (cargoholding, ritual service, piety, etc.)
- (iii) Good Farmer (wealthy, successful at corn and bean growing, industrious, etc.)

(iv) Helpful (friendly, generous, close to kin, etc.)
 These clusters correspond to the major groupings of phrases which may be applied to a good, respected man.

Similarly, with somewhat less confidence, Professor Cancian presents five Bad Clusters:

- (i) Violent (referring to all sorts of aggression)
- (ii) Lazy (the opposite of Good Farmer)
- (iii) Incompetent (without skills, unable to settle disputes, lame, etc.)
- (iv) Crafty (deceitful, malicious, dishonest)
- (v) Irreligious (avoids religious obligations).

The reader can judge for himself the extent to which these 'norms' underlie the moralizing which goes on in gossip. It seems likely that a clustering similar to that Prof. Cancian obtained by her 'Frame-Sort Method' could be coaxed from evaluative statements culled from real gossip. (That is, if we took all the sentences in the gossip corpus that characterized people or acts as 'good' or 'bad' and had informants sort them we might well expect similar piles to emerge.) This would be strong confirmation of the success of the artificial procedure devised by Prof. Cancian to elicit important evaluative concepts --- whether or not these can meaningfully be called 'norms.'