

VIRGINITY AND SEXUAL INITIATION IN MEXICO:

THE DIALOGIC NEGOTIATION OF MEANING

By

ANA MARIA GUADALUPE AMUCHASTEGUI HERRERA

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Social Sciences

January 1998

Goldsmiths College

University of London



ABSTRACT

VIRGINITY AND SEXUAL INITIATION IN MEXICO: THE DIALOGIC NEGOTIATION OF MEANING

ANA MARIA GUADALUPE AMUCHASTEGUI HERRERA

This research analyzes the construction of meaning of virginity and first sexual intercourse among young men and women in Mexican present society and culture. It documents a process of social change in which discourses of sexuality that had been dominant and unchallenged in Mexico, are now coexisting with modern constructions of subjectivity and sexuality. Sexual meanings are considered to be constructed by at least four different elements: social and local discourses, dialogues and the experience of the body.

From a phenomenological approach based on Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's work, this thesis discusses how individuals' experience of sexuality is linked to these four elements, by looking at the metaphors, stories, voices and rhetoric devices individuals use in their accounts. This is done through the interpretation of 23 conversations carried out with men and women from three different communities: an indigenous town in the south of the country, a rural settlement in central Mexico and an urban neighborhood in Mexico City.

The research situation is considered itself a dialogue, in which both researcher's and participants' discourses are interpreted. Both speakers are conceived as culturally situated and visible, and their interaction is looked at in terms of the negotiation of meaning within a power relationship. Two main categories that were inductively constructed are discussed in light of excerpts of field conversations: a) **The construction of gendered subjects of sexuality and the role of sexual knowledge**, and b) **the moral dimension of sexuality: evil, the sacred and rituals of sexual initiation**. The thesis also discusses the relevance of Foucault's work and Western theories on sexuality and gender identity, for the hybrid reality of Latin American present culture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
INTRODUCTION	9
1. Different conceptualizations of sexuality	12
2. AIDS and the preoccupation with sex: the political context of the study	15
3. Cultural hybridization in Latin America: the cultural context of the study	20
4. The method	24
5. The chapters	28
PART ONE: HISTORY, THEORY AND METHOD	30
I. The hybrid construction of sexuality in Mexico	30
1. Latin American modernity	31
2. Cultural hybridity and modernization	38
3. Secularization in Mexico	42
4. The history of sexuality in Mexico	44
4.1. Prehispanic conceptions	45
4.2. The Colonial period	50
4.3. The nineteenth century	57
4.4. Contemporary Mexico	62
i) Formal education and science in the school	63
ii) The Church	66
iii) The Government: health and population policies	69
iv) Social actors: feminism, gay and lesbian movements and right-wing groups	74
v) The media	80

II. Subjectivity, sexuality and experience	89
1. Sexuality and subjectivity	92
2. Sex, identity and gender	97
3. Agency and power	107
4. The role of experience	
in the construction of sexuality	111
4.1. Social discourses and experience	111
4.2. Local discourses and culture	116
4.3. Dialogue and meaning	126
4.4. The experience of the body	135
III. The negotiation of meaning through dialogue: the method	139
1. The situated dialogue: politics of research	139
1.1. The construction of the object of study: biography and method	140
1.2. Sexuality as a research problem, for whom?	144
1.3. Power relationships during fieldwork: conversations and contestation	149
2. The reasons for the qualitative method	152
3. The process of research	154
3.1. The sites	154
3.2. The fieldwork: a winding road	155
3.3. The invitation of participants	165
4. The construction of data	167
4.1. Coding	171
5. Analysis method: a process of deconstruction	174
5.1. Experience, narrative and metaphor	175
5.2. Dialogue and polyphony: the construction of self and other	180
6. Interpretation	183

PART TWO: DIALOGUES ON SEXUALITY, VIRGINITY AND SEXUAL INITIATION	190
1. The communities	190
1.1. The indigenous town	191
1.2. The rural community	197
1.3. The urban neighbourhood	201
2. The participants	205
2.1. The indigenous town	205
2.2. The rural community	210
2.3. The urban neighborhood	213
IV: The construction of gendered subjects of sexuality and the role of sexual knowledge	216
1. The construction of an autonomous individual	217
2. Subjects of sexual desire and practice: a gendered sexuality	223
2.1. The virgin-bride and the whore: a problematic split of the image of women	232
2.2. Women as subjects of desire: modernity and entitlement	243
3. To know about sex: men women, eroticism and information	252
3.1. Alternative stories and experiences of resistance	258
3.2. The effects of scientific knowledge upon sexual experience	262
4. Metaphor and dualism: the control of female sexuality	271
V: The moral dimension of sexuality: evil, the sacred and rituals of sexual initiation	276
1. The prescription of female sexuality: submission and resistance	277

2. The moral dimension of sexuality	291
2.1. Sexual intercourse as evil	293
2.2. Female virginity as sacred	303
2.3. Intercourse as pollution, dishonour and shame	308
3. Rituals related to first sexual intercourse: danger and the ordering of experience	315
3.1. Rituals of male initiation and their transformation	315
3.2. Rituals that repair women's loss of virginity	325
3.3. Virginity, the sacred and ritual: theoretical comments	336
 CONCLUSION: AMBIGUITY AND RESISTANCE: THE SURVIVAL OF SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGES IN THE FACE OF MODERNITY	 348
1. About the method	349
2. About identities	352
2.2. Sexuality defines identity?	354
2. About ambiguity and resistance: dominant and subjugated discourses of sexuality	357
4. About new research questions	364
 REFERENCES	 366
 APPENDIX A: Description of participants	 386
 APPENDIX B: Conversation guideline	 387
 APPENDIX C: Excerpts in Spanish	 389

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The process of making this thesis was fortunately populated with good experiences, interesting discussions and expressions of support and confidence in my work. I appreciate and cherish every moment of them. I have learned both intellectually and personally in the course of this research.

I thank Dr. Jane Littlewood, my supervisor at Goldsmiths College, for her extremely intelligent questions and her constant advice and company during the hardships I went through in order to make my own way in the world of social science. The dialogues I had with her, both in person and by other means, were always challenging and enriching.

This endeavour would have been impossible without the valuable support of the **Departamento de Educación y Comunicación** of the **Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana - Xochimilco** in Mexico City, which allowed me to dedicate myself totally to my research. I trust that this learning process will profit the University through my own teaching and research.

I also thank my friend and colleague, Dr. Kathryn Tolbert, director of the Regional Program of Gender, Family and Reproductive Health of the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean of The Population Council, who warmly and respectfully provided the best conditions for the initial phases and the field work of this research and offered interesting comments to several drafts.

The Mellon Foundation also supported the writing-up of this thesis, through the Center for Population, Gender and Social Inequality of the University of Maryland.

The help that I received from the following non-government organizations and persons was very precious to me: **Casa para la Atención de Adolescentes de San Miguel de Allende** in Guanajuato; **Casa de la Mujer**, Don Félix, Doña Petra and Francisco González, and the cooperative of women weavers (whose name I will not disclose for the sake of

confidentiality) from Oaxaca, and **Salud Integral para la Mujer** and Carolina Grajales in Mexico City. I honour their continuous and committed work. I am particularly grateful to those young men and women that shared their stories with me and allowed me to learn from them. It is my hope to return their generosity.

The ideas here presented were the result of a long and winding process of dialogue with friends and colleagues. I thank Carmen de la Peza for the openness and bright ideas that she always shared with me in the most difficult moments. Dr. Victor Seidler also helped me to hold my own thoughts valuable, and he taught me a lot about what knowledge is about.

I am indebted to my colleagues from the **Grupo de trabajo sobre Sexualidad y Género**, from the **Programa 'Salud Reproductiva y Sociedad'** of **El Colegio de México**, coordinated by my friend Ivonne Szasz, for their most challenging discussions about my work. I also appreciated the sessions we had at the **Seminario sobre Investigación Cualitativa**, in my own Department at the University.

Coco and Gero, my parents, were my loyal companions through all the difficulties, joys and frustrations of this process, furthermore, of my life. Their presence is most cherished to me.

Finally, I thank all those good friends that listened and stayed close to me during this endeavour: my dear sister Maite, Mónica Duarte, Pablo Herrera, my brothers and friends Gero and Ceci, and Jose and Gaby, Miriam Gutiérrez, Olga Guedes, Marta Rivas, Xóchitl and Itzá Castañeda, Mar Aguilar, Teresa Carbó, María Diego and Ester Althaus, who have been a constant and precious light along the way. A special mention to all my great nieces and nephews, who remind me how good it is to have a sense of discovery.

At the end of this learning process life has given me many precious gifts. Among them, the space for new and clear love.

INTRODUCTION

The object of this thesis is the process of construction of the meaning of virginity and first sexual intercourse, among young men and women in Mexican present society and culture¹. It intends to document a process of social change in which Catholic discourses of sexuality that had been dominant during centuries are now coexisting with modern constructions of subjectivity and sexuality divulged by the school, Government health and population campaigns, and the media. Although I describe the macrosocial and historical aspects of this issue², I focus upon the ways in which individuals from different cultural contexts in Mexico construct their experience of first sexual intercourse in the face of such discursive turmoil. Thus, the emphasis of the study is actually the relationship between the individual and the cultural dimensions, as expressed through the ways participants construct themselves -or not- as subjects of a certain sexuality.

This discussion is important because, from the point of view of the study of subjectivity and sexuality in different cultures, first sexual intercourse is a major event in the passage from childhood to adulthood in many societies, because it signals the moment in which a young girl or boy have reached the conditions and the situation which make them capable of reproduction. The way men and women make sense of such an experience takes place within a cultural context that offers certain frames for interpretation, and which also introduce certain techniques and discourses of power and resistance.

I also intend to look at the role of gender in the construction of meaning of sexual practice through the analysis of accounts, stories and descriptions of the

¹ The field work for this research was made possible thanks to The Population Council and the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana - Xochimilco. The Mellon Foundation supported the writing-up of this thesis.

² See chapter I: **The hybrid construction of sexuality in Mexico.**

bonds and power relationships established between partners during first sexual intercourse. In this analysis, I will look at the presence of dominant and subjugated discourses of sexuality and their possible relationship to images of gender in participants' accounts, as well as their position before them. For this study, the normativities associated with sexuality are conceived as power relationships in terms that they that have a principal role in constituting subjectivity. Following Foucault's (1980) concept of power not as a thing to be possessed, but exercised through relationships, normativities are not seen as vertical impositions by which dominant groups design, produce and transmit certain meanings to subjugated social groups. Therefore, even though dominant discourses can be identified, their effectiveness cannot be assumed exclusively by the extent of their dissemination, because it does not mean that they will be appropriated by individuals in terms of their own sexual meanings and practices. Carole Vance (1989) identifies space for individual response and resistance:

To take for a fact that symbols have a unitary meaning, the one assigned to them by dominant culture, means to stop studying the experience and knowledge of the symbols in the individuals, as well as the individual capacity to transform and manipulate them in a complex manner which draws from play, creativity, humor and wit (Vance 1989:33*)³.

Thus, issues of agency, subjectivity and identity in Mexican contemporary culture are discussed both theoretically and in light of the concepts drawn from the field conversations.

The thesis starts from the conception that sexual meanings are constructed through the interaction of four elements: social discourses, local discourses, meaning as dialogically constructed, and the subjective experience of the body⁴. These elements are considered as processes that

³ Translated from the Spanish version by myself. From here on, the sign * indicates my own translation from Spanish to English.

⁴ See chapter II: **Subjectivity, sexuality and experience.**

pertain to the ways individuals give meaning to the experience of their bodies, desires, fantasies and practices, and not as contexts that determine such meanings. Meaning is considered as a dialogical production in which the individual and the social become embedded within the experience of the subject, therefore making the distinction of internal and external irrelevant. The object of this study is then to look at the interaction of these four elements within the 'subjective consciousness' (Voloshinov 1929/1973), because it will try to describe how individuals' experience of sexuality is linked to power relationships. An important issue for this research is thus to investigate the degree of authority granted by the speakers to such social discourses in the construction of sexual meanings.

According to the constructionist view of sexuality, its definition has always been subject to cultural and historical considerations, as was the birth of the concept itself (Foucault 1981), so that in order to understand sexual meanings, it is necessary to look at the cultural environment within which they originated. Since Mexico is undergoing a deep transformation because of secularization and modernization, and its particular participation in the globalization of culture, sexual meanings are being transformed as well. It is the interest of this thesis to analyze the relative importance of contemporary social discourses on sexuality for individuals of different cultural groups, and how they resort to these discursive resources in the telling and construction of their experience and identities. Thus, this research intends to contribute to the production of knowledge about the cultural specificities of sexuality in Mexico, especially from the experience of the individual before the present multiplicity of social normativities and subjugated discourses of practice.

It is also my interest to explore the relevance of certain concepts of Western theory of sexuality, subjectivity and identity for Mexican present culture,

especially in terms of the match between Foucault's works on sexuality (1981, 1988) as constructed in the West, and how this process can be thought of in Mexican culture. I will do this by both tracing the history of social discourses of sexuality in Mexico and by detecting their presence and relative power to define sexual experience and identity within the discourse of a group of individuals from different backgrounds.

I discuss these issues through the analysis of 23 conversations with 11 women and 12 men from three different communities that illustrate the hybrid experience of sexuality amidst Mexican contemporary culture. I consider the process of research as a dialogue in which both mine and participants' discourses are interpreted. Both speakers are conceived as culturally situated (Rosaldo 1991) and their interaction is looked at in terms of the negotiation of meaning within a power relationship. Thus, a reflexive approach is taken in terms of method and interpretation of field material⁵. Through an inductive approach I constructed two main categories to analyze the most important meanings of virginity and sexual initiation found during the conversations. These substantive categories are: 1) **The gendered construction of subjects of sexuality and the role of sexual knowledge,** and 2) **the moral dimension of sexuality: evil, the sacred and rituals of sexual initiation**⁶.

Before looking at these issues in detail, this introduction will discuss the theoretical, political and cultural background that led to the construction of this research's object, method and findings.

1. Different conceptualizations of sexuality

Presently, research on sexuality is a contested field in which languages from very different cultural

⁵ See chapter III: **The negotiation of meaning through dialogue: the method.**

⁶ See chapters IV and V.

backgrounds and intentions clash, meet and struggle within academic, activist and policy making arenas in an effort to understand, influence and/or even control sexual behaviour. During the last two centuries, scholars from the biological and the social sciences have tried to grasp and come to terms with men's and women's sexual practices. The approaches to this subject can be broadly classified in two areas defined by their differing conceptualizations of sexuality and therefore, by their different implications for theory, political action and research.

On the one hand, there is a body of research which resulted from a historical process of knowledge construction, in which sexuality is regarded and depicted as an inherent biological quality of the individual, and as the defining element of his/her identity. Since sexuality and the body are considered to be the essence of the person because they would tell a fundamental truth about him/her, Weeks (1991) calls them 'essentialist' traditions. In these, sexuality is described as a powerful and relentless natural force that compels individuals to express it and as an organic need to be satisfied, threatening civilization and therefore bound to be limited and controlled by culture. These approaches found their organized and legitimized expression in the creation of sexology, the science of sexuality, which was a crucial element in the historical process of the medicalization and psychologization of sexual behaviour that has unfolded in Western societies since the last decades of the past century⁷.

Freud deepened and enriched this perspective -from which he originally drew- by theorizing sex as a drive, namely, as a psychic representation of a somatic instinct (1915/1973) that needed to be tamed and directed through the civilizing work of culture:

...it is inescapable to acknowledge the degree to which culture lies on the renunciation of instinctual

⁷ For a detailed analytical overview of the birth of sexology in Europe, see Weeks (1993).

needs: the extent to which its previous condition is situated precisely in the dissatisfaction (by suppression, repression or any other process?) of powerful instincts. This **cultural frustration** rules the vast domain of social relations among human beings, and we know that in it lies the cause of hostility against all culture (Freud 1929/1973:3038*).

Through the validation of the scientific study of sexual behaviour, certain models and codes for sexual practice could be regarded as natural to the human being, and proposed as a norm based on the status derived from such knowledge. This was particularly the case for heterosexual intercourse, probably because of its relationship to reproduction and its importance for then rising concerns about demographic issues (Weeks 1992a).

In modern societies, these approaches have had a definite effect in terms of political considerations, because they have served as a basis for the classification, stigmatization and segregation of individuals who do not conform to dominant constructions of sexual behaviour, and as the platform for what Foucault has called 'bio-power' (1985), that is, the use of diverse strategies of power that attempt to control and monitor both individual bodies and the population as a whole.

A critical stance toward essentialism was elaborated by social constructionism, inaugurated by Foucault's work (1981), which analyzed sexuality as a historical construct, as an 'invention' which had developed as a means of widening possibilities for the exercise of power within modern societies. Weeks (1986) says that:

...what we define as 'sexuality' is an historical construction, which brings together a host of different biological and mental possibilities -gender identity, bodily differences, reproductive capacities, needs, desires and fantasies- which need not be linked together, and in other cultures have not been (Weeks 1986:15).

Thus, for the social constructionist approach, the organic capabilities for pleasure and bodily sensations, practices and activities are only considered and called 'sexuality' within certain social contexts, especially in

modern Western societies. This is not to deny the biological processes of sexual activity, but to assert that they do not determine their expression, and that it is culture which ultimately shapes them. This would mean that sexual partners, desires, fantasies and meanings are not biologically determined but socially constructed within power relationships which define what is normal or abnormal, good or bad, within a given historical period and culture. Some authors go as far as to consider that society constructs biology as well, for example Turner's (1989) analysis of the body as a social construct.

As said above, this study is located within the field of social constructionist approaches to sexuality⁸, because it shares the conception that what is called sexuality is not a universal and biological given but a product of history and culture, relative in terms of the particularities and specificities of different social contexts and periods. The construction of sexuality as 'natural' is thus contested.

2. AIDS and the preoccupation for sex: The political context of the study

Besides starting off from a social constructionist point of view, this study can be related to the field of research on social and cultural aspects of sexuality which has grown and come forward particularly since the emergence of AIDS. Worldwide concern over the devastating effects of the epidemic mobilized a vast amount of resources from international funding agencies in order to gather information about sexual practices all over the globe, with the intention and belief that this knowledge could help prevent widespread infection. However, depending on their political stance toward sexuality, this vast number of studies have often served as the basis for

⁸ For a thorough discussion about current debates in social constructionism see Stein (1992).

further stigmatization of individuals that perform non-legitimized sexual practices, for example homosexuality or so called 'promiscuity'.

Also, the interest of developed countries in details and specificities of sexual behaviours of developing countries' populations has directed a lot of research efforts. As Weeks (1986) states, issues of developing countries' population growth control have emerged as a powerful impulse for this production of knowledge:

On a global scale, the belief in the superiority of European norm is perhaps more clearly revealed in the obsessive Western concern with the population explosion of the Third World, which has led to various efforts on the part of development agencies as well as local authorities to impose Western patterns of artificial birth control, sometimes with disastrous results as the delicate ecology of social life has been unbalanced (Weeks 1986:40).

In this context, the agendas underlying this scientific endeavour have largely determined research designs, target populations and the kind of dissemination of results, therefore participating in certain strategies of globalizing meanings of sexuality, in order to support, for instance, the use of contraception, or the practice of safer sex.

In the field of AIDS research in Mexico, quantitative studies have tried to report on frequencies, actors and situations of sexual behaviour, as well as on knowledge, attitudes and practices, in the case of a great number of surveys (KAP studies⁹) (CONAPO 1988, Izazola, Valdespino, Juárez et al 1989, Dirección General de Epidemiología 1989). This kind of studies was most popular at the onset of the epidemic, but they were later criticized for overemphasizing the importance of rational thinking:

...[in the process of] decision making in situations where cultural norms and values as well as social pressures may militate against 'thinking through' in any logical manner the likely consequences, costs and

⁹ These surveys were developed by the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research in the United States during the 1940's and applied to the reality of this country without major modification or adaptations.

benefits of different courses of action prior to having sex (Aggleton 1996:6).

These studies have also been questioned because they did not take into consideration the importance of the cultural context in the production of such beliefs and practices, nor the relativity of their research instruments. Interviewees were assumed to have a clear and explicit sense of their answers and their statements were considered to be equivalent to their actual practice.

Recently in Mexico, qualitative research projects on cultural aspects of sexuality (Bronfman, Rodríguez, Amuchástegui et al 1995, González Block and Liguori 1993) have tried to explain the complexity of subjective processes involved in the outcome of sexual behaviours, that could not be sufficiently accounted for in demographic and epidemiological studies like the ones mentioned above.

This shift in focus from behaviours to subjective processes came partly from the failure of the predictive value of such studies and from the recognition that information has not been enough to curtail the spread of infection. Therefore, the assumption that cultural meanings influence both the kind of sexual practices carried out and the possibilities of prevention of unwanted consequences, such as pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, made the study of this issues relevant to contemporary policy problems related to sexual and reproductive health, as well as to concerns of population growth.

This is the reason why epistemological and political agendas fight against each other in an attempt to produce definite knowledge on the subject for, within the present context of modernization and globalization of economy and culture, sexuality has been defined as a key process for social relations, both in micro and macrostructures.

From the point of view of population issues and health policy, the sexuality of young people has been

socially constructed as problematic. Studies about sexual debut are mainly concerned with risk practices, which entail the lack of use of contraceptives and of preventive measures against sexually transmitted diseases (Moore and Rosenthal 1992, Friedman 1992, and García and Figueroa 1992). These preoccupations are not limited to the Mexican government, but reflect the concerns of developed countries with developing countries' population growth and with the spread of disease.

The construction of adolescent pregnancy as a social problem (Nathanson 1991) has made young women's sexuality a particular target of control and intervention, particularly in the United States, but this conception is spreading its influence across other countries¹⁰. Although some aspects of these concerns could be relevant to the population involved, the ways in which they are approached is widely debated in different political fora because they do not always take into consideration the point of view of the actors involved, like women and young people, but only the priorities of dominant social groups.

These concerns can be illustrated with data drawn from a number of Mexican studies on adolescent sexuality. These studies focus on the ability of young people to protect themselves, and they report that most young men and women in Mexico do not take steps to prevent either pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases in their first intercourse. A survey carried out in Mexico City (Secretaría de Salud 1988) with 15 to 24 year old men and women showed that 32.8% of the boys and 35.8% of the girls used contraception during their first sexual intercourse. Out of this proportion of users, only 11.7% of the boys and 18.8% of the girls used modern methods. The rest did not use any contraception at all. Although lack of

¹⁰ According to a study conducted in Mexico, the proportion of women aged 15 to 19 who give birth to children before marriage has increased. While in 1976 it was 17% of the total, by 1987 this proportion had increased to 34.6%. These figures show a tendency to delay marriage to later ages, but not fertility. Therefore, even though girls seem to get married older, they are not preventing pregnancy to the same extent. The result is a larger number of single mothers and of fatherless children. (Rábago 1993)

knowledge was the reason most argued for not preventing pregnancy (out of non-users, 44% of the boys and 32.3% of the girls declared that they did not know about contraceptive methods, nor how to use them or where to find them), it is not the sole cause of the existence of such a vast majority of non-users. For instance, another 28.1% of the boys and 30.3% of the girls said that their reason for not using contraception was that they had not planned to have sexual intercourse.

In their quest for explanations about youth's inability to use contraception, these studies fail to explain why information is not enough to foster contraception use, because they do not tackle other processes that may be curtailing their widespread use. These could include the role of sexual meanings, which cannot be understood through records of practice alone, but taking into account cultural and subjective processes that influence the outcome of sexual behaviour. However, most of the studies that intend to shed light on this issue try to provide further information for the design of prevention policies and campaigns, aimed at increasing the use of contraception and prevention, without looking at the social and economic conditions in which individuals have to take sexual and reproductive decisions. Some studies have in fact shown that women will have difficulty using contraceptive or preventive measures as long as their material conditions remain unfavorable to their independence and autonomy (George 1996 and Szasz 1996) as it is the case among vast social groups of developing countries.

The focus of this study is not on sexual practice itself, nor on the frequency of the use of contraception or of safe sex, but on the meanings constructed around these issues and the discursive elements that participants are using in order to make sense of their sexual experience.

3. Cultural hybridization in Latin America: the cultural context of the study

The idea that sexuality is socially constructed, as discussed above, does not mean that it does not exist. On the contrary, the origins of the concept can be traced over the last two centuries in Western culture, and the globalizing tendency of the latter has caused this social construction to have profound material, emotional and behavioral effects on individuals from different cultures.

From all these different situations, the way in which globalization has affected Latinamerican countries involves special characteristics. For Latin America, modernization and globalization have mainly meant further polarities between the North and the South, as well as between the rich and the poor within countries:

...what we are going through in Latinamerican countries does not resemble at all a transition from tradition to modernity, from a rural to an industrial society or from an archaic model into the 'perfection' of modernity... The processes of modernization have led to nothing but the consolidation of dependency bonds under new forms of control... Modernity is often a mirage, a world that seems to be always at hand but still [a world] to which we can never have access (Paris 1990:7*).

In terms of culture, another particularity of many Latinamerican cultures is **mestizaje**¹¹, that is, the racial and cultural mixture which has resulted from the violent encounter between Indian and European-Catholic cultures during the years of colonialism, nowadays transformed by modern processes like migration, formal education and the media. All these situations currently happening in Latin America produce the contradictory effect of a certain homogenization among diverse social and cultural groups, together with the development of sharper differences between them, both economically and culturally. This situation provides the context in which the social

¹¹ **Mestizaje** is the process by which Indian and Spanish populations mixed during the Colonial period. Nowadays, the majority of the population are actually **mestizos**.

construction of sexuality is taking place in Mexico. For the Latinamerican anthropologist García Canclini (1990):

Latinamerican countries are presently the result of the sedimentation, juxtaposition and crossing of indigenous traditions..., colonial Catholic Hispanism and modern political, educational and communicational actions... The secularizing and renovating impulses of modernity were more efficient among the 'cultured' groups, but certain elites preserved their roots in Hispanic-Catholic traditions, and in certain areas also in indigenous traditions, as resources to justify privileges derived from the old regime, [that were] challenged by the expansion of massive culture (García Canclini 1990:71*).

Therefore, Mexican culture is nowadays a mixture in which elements from different origins coexist in a particular blend. For instance, the experience of modernity, not only in terms of material development, but also of the construction of the subject as a sovereign individual¹², is not familiar to the general population of Mexico. Democracy and citizenship are still alien concepts to the ordinary Mexican, because political modernization is far from being accomplished and because the respect for rights in the judicial system is quite deficient due to widespread corruption.

Another characteristic of modern societies that is not pervasive in Mexican society is the direct participation of the State in people's lives, especially in what were once considered private areas -like sexual activity-, which fosters a sense of individualism and free choice and establishes a face-to-face relationship between the individual and the State. As Caplan (1987a) indicates:

...a feature of the recent past has been the increasing intervention of the State into the arena of sexuality ...it is not accidental that contemporary (Western) culture tends to reify sex as a thing-in-itself (Caplan 1987a:19).

¹²) Hall (1992) locates the birth of this modern subject between the Renaissance (sixteenth century) and the Enlightenment (eighteenth century). This subject would be conceived as unified and indivisible, as well as rational, capable of objective knowledge of the world and 'free from dogma', which also meant that he (this subject was always male) was not under the institutional control of the Church, as it was spread by Protestantism and its emphasis on the direct relationship of the individual with God. Needless to say, the experience of Catholic countries would make a difference, furthermore in countries like Mexico, in which Catholicism mixed with pre-Hispanic religions and beliefs.

Although Mexican society is undergoing a transformation, it is not doing so in a linear progression or homogeneous manner, because kinship organization and a strong sense of community still have a powerful impact upon individuals' lives. Family and small social groups seem to function as filters, relativizing the efficiency of the attempts of the State to regulate reproduction and sexuality through formal education, law and health services.

Following this argument, I ask myself, along with Caplan (1987a):

...is there a qualitative difference in sexuality in 'modern' societies? Is it that in kinship-based societies sexuality is embedded in other institutions and cannot be isolated, whereas in modern societies sex has not only become a form of consumerism, but a thing-in-itself? (Caplan 1987a:24).

Since Mexican society is characterized by a combination of modernity with a kinship-based social organization, the above question is relevant to this study because I intend to investigate if sexuality is constructed, in certain groups of Mexican culture, as independent from other social institutions, like gender relations and family organization. Sexuality and gender relate to each other in many different ways according to cultural meanings, and this relationship is not always linear. For example, sexual practice sometimes, but not always, defines gender identity, as it would be the case in Western societies, where heterosexuality defines a person to be a man or a woman.

Within feminism, Rubin has suggested the analytical separation between sexuality and gender because:

...it seemed to me [in her previous work] that gender and sexual desire were systematically entwined in such social formations. This can or cannot be a precise appraisal of the relationship of sex and gender in tribal organizations, but it is certainly not a suitable formulation for sexuality in Western industrialized societies (Rubin 1989:183*).

Following this concept, she makes a differentiation between industrialized and what she calls 'tribal'

societies in terms of sexuality. This distinction should open up the possibilities of understanding further the diversity and dynamics of two different systems that relate to each other in different ways according to the social context. Rubin (1989) offers a critique of feminism in terms of it wanting to account for sexuality as it has done for gender, because

...feminist thought simply lacks angles of vision that can embrace the social organization of sexuality (Rubin 1989:186*).

In this thesis, one of the ways to analyze and test the relevance of certain aspects of Western theory for Mexican culture, will be to analyze the ways in which sexuality and gender are or not related within participants' accounts of experiences of first intercourse.

Although the object of this research is not the history of discourses of sexuality in Mexico, I will briefly discuss the historical literature about sexuality so as to identify what discourses are currently competing to establish their dominance¹³. This revision should produce a more specific frame for interpretation of how members of certain social groups are using social discourses in order to describe their experience of sexuality, and therefore which discourses are dominant for them. It remains to be seen if Mexican culture shares, for instance, the same importance that sexuality has in the constitution of Western subjects and their identities, as described by Weeks (1992a).

Modernity also implies the transference of discourses of sexuality from religion to the State and science, a move which Weeks (1992a) describes as:

... the new, more secular legal order that gradually developed during the century, marking the decisive shift from ecclesiastical to State regulation of sexual behavior, [which] was often much more effective in controlling even minor misdemeanors than previously (Weeks 1992a:231).

¹³ See chapter I.

Even though there is such a process of secularization of sexuality in Mexico (Blancarte 1993), its pervasiveness is relative because religious discourse still coexists uneasily with scientific information disseminated in schools and in family planning policies implemented through the media and State health services. Therefore, sexual experience is being permeated with different degrees of such discourses' dominance, forcing people to try to come to terms with this mixture and to find a personal stance toward them.

To look at the impact of these cultural processes upon subjectivity is precisely the goal of this thesis, so I will next briefly describe the means that I designed in order to carry out this kind of analysis.

4. The Method

As said above, for social constructionism sexuality is linked to the cultural production of meaning which, in turn, depends upon language. Rather than objective and essential objects, sexuality, just as reality and identity, are constructed within social interactions through language. This is why it was so important for this research to draw upon a theory of language and subjectivity as the main standpoints for conceptualization.

I start off from the conception that subjectivity is not fixed, but constructed through dialogue with others, within particular social and historical conditions, in which power relations have a major role. I have drawn from phenomenological approaches to language (Bakhtin 1981, Voloshinov 1929/1973), experience (Turner and Bruner 1986), and culture (Tedlock and Mannheim 1995) in order to construct a theoretical and methodological framework that will not only account for the meaning of sexuality as a construction that organizes personal experience within dominant social discourses, but that also conceptualizes the research situation as a dialogue, a conversation in

which both speakers (the researcher and the participants) are politically and socially 'situated' and 'visible' (Rosaldo 1991) and therefore in need of being looked at and analyzed in terms of our negotiation of meaning.

Thus, the research situations here are called 'conversations' and analyzed as a joint construction of meaning, in which my personal and social characteristics exerted certain effect on participants and viceversa, shaping diverse power relationships in which we accepted, resisted or questioned the other's definitions of virginity and sexual debut. These dialogues are described as the encounter of two individuals from different social, class, ethnic and sometimes gender backgrounds, who tried to produce common meanings around the subject of sexuality, making use and supporting different social discourses according to the topic, the degree of asymmetry of the relationship and the importance given to religion, science or personal experience as the defining contexts for sexuality.

Apart from analyzing the conversations in terms of their most important and substantive topics, I worked with four major linguistic features that helped to characterize the dialogues. These are: narrative (Turner and Bruner 1986), metaphor and rhetoric (Haste 1994), and polyphony (Bakhtin 1963/1984). All these forms of speech served as main tools for trying to convey meaning and express experience to the other speaker, in an ongoing process of quoting different social voices and relating to them in different degrees of authority¹⁴.

In summary, the thesis is not about the role of sexuality in the constitution of the psychic subject, which has been studied widely by psychoanalytic theory, but about the construction of the meaning of sexuality that individuals produce within social relationships marked by political conditions in a particular period and culture.

¹⁴ See chapter III: **The negotiation of meaning through dialogue: the method.**

Therefore, in accordance with the transformation that contemporary Mexico is undergoing, I chose three different areas to carry out the study, taking into account cultural, economic and social heterogeneity:

- An Indian community in the southern state of Oaxaca, whose population is mainly bilingual and has good access to formal education. Migration and crafts trade have integrated the town into national and international markets, without eliminating their culture.

- A rural village in Guanajuato, central Mexico, that survives mainly through the flow of migrant workers. The Catholic Church exerts considerable influence on community life.

- A working-class urban neighbourhood in Mexico City whose youth have better educational opportunities, although not the same can be said about jobs, because of widespread unemployment. The inhabitants are mainly descendants of migrant workers from rural Mexico.

I designed the research as an instrumental case study (Stake 1994) because I was interested in illustrating, through these three cases, the relationship between subjectivity, sexuality and experience, within the hybridity of Mexican contemporary culture. The cases themselves are less relevant than their potential to provide insight on the concepts described above.

The main instrument to construct data for analysis were 23 one-to-one conversations between young men and women (15 to 30 years old) and myself, in which I invited them to tell their stories or expectations about their first sexual intercourse, amongst other aspects of their lives.

The in-depth character of this research demanded a number of cases that could be manageable for qualitative and interpretive analysis. The selection of participants followed an ethnographic approach that considers members of a certain community able to produce information about

it (Honigmann 1982). The quality of such information was evaluated through the density of the metaphors, stories and descriptions of the experience of first intercourse. Therefore, the final number of cases to be analyzed (23) was decided on after the conversations had taken place and had been transcribed.

Participants were contacted mainly through non-governmental organizations that had been working with them, whether in health issues or work projects. In most cases, there was an initial group meeting in order to present myself and the research project, asking for their collaboration -on a voluntary basis- for individual conversations. I introduced myself as a social psychologist from a public university from Mexico City, who was researching the ways young couples were being formed in different parts of the country. I made myself available for all participants that wanted to talk about issues related to this topic. Such an invitation allowed for many conversations to be based upon participants' demands, mainly on sexuality, gender and couple issues.

Not all participants belonged to an organization, especially men. Many of them were contacted through a 'snow ball' method, in which participants that agreed to collaborate introduced me to other potential participants.

Conversations were coded and analyzed as whole dialogues between myself and the participants, according to the nuances and subcategories that illustrated certain aspects of the theoretical issues. The interpretation was made as close to the data as possible, by inducting categories from the actual utterances of the speakers, and by looking at the interplay between dominant and subjugated discourses in my own and participants' accounts, as well as our position before them, in terms of the authority we granted them to describe our experience. The interpretations are not taken as the only possible ones, although they are always grounded upon the texts drawn from the conversations, so that readers can see the process that I followed in reaching them.

5. The chapters

The thesis is divided in two parts: Part One, **History, Theory and Method**, sets the background for the study. Chapter I, **The hybrid construction of sexuality in Mexico** discusses certain trends of contemporary Mexican culture regarding modernity and secularization, which serve as the platform for the transformation of sexual cultures. The chapter also describes discourses that have been dominant in Mexico at different times, as well as current discourses from diverse social actors that compete to define sexuality. In chapter II, **Subjectivity, sexuality and experience**, I discuss the main theoretical referents that guided this research, based upon constructionist works on sexuality and views of gender as actively constructed by individuals amidst certain cultural environment. I also develop my vision upon agency and power in light of the latter theories and the concept of experience, as constituted by four discursive elements: social and local discourses, dialogue and meaning, and the subjective experience of the body. Chapter III: **The negotiation of meaning through dialogue: the method**, describes the process of research in a narrative way, describing its history as well as its political background. Issues regarding data gathering and interpretation are discussed thoroughly.

Part Two, **Dialogues on sexuality, virginity and sexual initiation** provides background information about the communities and the participants, and argues about the categories that were constructed inductively from field material. Chapter IV: **The construction of gendered subjects of sexuality and the role of sexual knowledge** describes the different ways in which participants constructed themselves -or not- as independent and autonomous individuals, and as subjects of desire or of sexuality. The different meaning of sensual and scientific knowledge for the experience of male and female

participants is also illustrated. Chapter V: **The moral dimension of sexuality: evil, the sacred and rituals of sexual initiation** discusses the presence of dominant and subjugated discourses of sexuality, especially Catholic morality, and the degrees of secularization expressed by participants. Concepts of sex as evil, dishonour and shame offered during the conversations are illustrated along with certain rituals related to first intercourse and the transformation they are suffering.

Finally, the conclusion, **Ambiguity and resistance: the survival of subjugated knowledges in the face of modernity**, discusses methodological questions posed by this research, as well as the relevance of certain Western concepts of subjectivity and sexuality for Mexican culture, and the complex dynamics of dominant and subjugated discourses of sexuality within participants' expressions of experience.

PART ONE

HISTORY, THEORY AND METHOD

The first part of this thesis presents the historical and theoretical referents that framed the object of study, as well as its method. The first chapter describes certain trends of present Mexican culture, which affect the social construction of sexuality, taking into account the history of dominant discourses from prehispanic cultures to contemporary Mexico. The second chapter discusses the major concepts that constructed the object of study, which are those of subjectivity, sexuality and experience, as constituted by discourse and power. Finally, the third chapter describes the process of research and its vicissitudes and decisions.

I

THE HYBRID CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUALITY IN MEXICO

At present, the social construction of sexuality in Mexico is a heterogeneous, ongoing process that is nurtured by social languages that have their origins in different epochs, classes and social groups. Such plurality of discourses is part of a larger process of transformation that Mexican culture is undergoing, as a result of its relationship to modernity. That is to say that the construction of sexuality in Mexico has been a historical process in which modernity has had a definite input, both in terms of structural changes that influence sexual practices and of social discourses that have

collided and met in order to define it. Individuals' experience of virginity and sexual initiation is shaped within this turmoil of discourses that serve as cultural frameworks for their construction of meaning. Thus, in order to study participants' stories and accounts of first intercourse, I will discuss in this chapter the importance of different social discourses about sexuality that now coexist in Mexico.

This discussion will address the characteristics of modernity in Mexico, describing briefly its economic traits, but focusing on the hybridization of culture as a key element to understand Latin American present societies. I will do so through the analyses of Latin American sociologists and anthropologists who discuss the implications of modernity for the region. Through their work, they have shown that the Western idea of modernity as an inexorable global process implies another form of eurocentrism that disregards and ignores other realities and societies different to them.

1. Latin American modernity.

In recent years there has been much discussion among Latin American sociologists and social theorists regarding whether or not these countries are modern, a discussion that relates to the place of Indian cultures within the National State. On the one hand, there is a body of research that could be called 'indigenist' which considers Indian cultures to be the genuine essence of Mexican culture and, in a way, exhorts us to go back to those origins. On the other hand, there are other authors that consider that **mestizaje** is precisely what constitutes our culture and also the starting point to understand our own version of modernity.

Among the 'indigenist' authors is Bonfil (1990) who considers that there are two Mexicos: one is the 'deep'

Mexico, constituted by Indian and Mesoamerican¹ traditions, world-views and forms of social organization, that survive both among indigenous groups and in isolated expressions of urban culture. According to this author, this 'deep Mexico' has been denied and subjected by the other Mexico, the 'imaginary' one, formed by the civilizing project of the West brought originally by the Spanish and carried on by the groups that have been dominant since the Independence in 1821. As Brunner (1992) critically stresses, Bonfil points to the existence of:

... a deep America -a continent interwoven with nature, uncorrupted by the Western project, more true and fecund- and an imaginary pseudomodern America, Westernized, that imposes itself on the other, being ignorant of it, crushing it and silencing it (1992:26*).

For this body of research, the 'deep Mexico' would be the real and original one, while the 'imaginary Mexico' would only be an alien substitution of our own character. These two Mexicos would have met through domination and subjugation, so that the 'deep' Mexico is now expressed only through resistance to foreign imposition.

This interpretation of the cultural diversity of Mexican society implies a certain manicheism and a folkloric vision that denies the dynamics of power relationships between classes and ethnic groups in contemporary Mexico. First of all, the present indigenous groups are not the original ones, because they have been transformed and have transformed themselves along the process of interaction with Western culture, so that what Bonfil defends as our true identity does not longer exist. His romantic vision implies that what is

¹ Mesoamerica was a cultural and geographical region in which many civilizations lived before the arrival of the Spanish. This area was what are now the central and southern regions of Mexico, Guatemala, Belice, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Such civilizations were the olmecan, teotihuacan, zapotecan, mayan, toltecan, mexican, huastecan, totonacan, mixtecan and others. Even though there were some differences in their cosmologies, all these peoples shared many mythological and religious beliefs and rituals. (López Austin 1996).

authentically Mexican is related only to Indian cultures, denying that the nation has mainly been constituted by **mestizaje**. Latin America is precisely the product of the clash, often violent and unequal, of Western and Mesoamerican civilizations, and, although there is a coexistence of Indian and **mestizo** world-views, languages and ways of life, there are no longer any original nations that would represent the pure and untouched peoples from Mesoamerica.

Although this approach has been important in terms of political struggle for Indian peoples' rights, it has also produced the deepening of differences between Indian and **mestizo** population, apart that it does not account for what Mexico is presently. The question of modernity here would be seen almost exclusively as an imperialist endeavor that endangers our true identity.

Against this arguments, I agree with Bartra's (1987) critical position, in that this concept of a dual Mexico -a traditional, Indian, rural Mexico that has been left behind, and a modern, urban, **mestizo** and industrial Mexico- has become an imaginary obsession for many Mexican authors and analysts. Instead of considering this duality as if it were a reality, Bartra treats it as a construction that, by hiding the multifaceted character of the country, has helped the hegemonic groups in their quest to convey the idea of a Mexican identity that is above all cultural and class differences, and which has been a key element in the formation of the capitalist national State (Bartra 1987).

The construction of such a national society, by submitting diversity to the direction of hegemonic groups, and to their own definition of the nation, is one of the major landmarks of the modernization of Mexico. But, presently, there is a debate among intellectuals whether or not Mexico is a modern society. Some of them, like Paz (1979), make this evaluation by comparing Mexican history to that of Western countries. This author

says that Latin America, and especially Mexico, has not arrived to modernity completely because:

At the time that Europe opens to philosophic, scientific and political critique that prepared the modern world, Spain closes itself and locks up its better spirits in the conceptual cages of neo-scholasticism. Hispanic peoples have not been able to be really modern because, in contrast to the rest of the Westerners, we did not have a critical age (1979:34*).

In a way, Fuentes (1990) agrees with Paz by saying that Mexico is a product of the Counter-Reformation erected by the Spanish as a wall against modernity. If we inherited this vision through the conquest, how, then, can we be modern? The issue is, at least, problematic.

I disagree with both Paz and Fuentes' view because they are partial by considering modernity as if it were an evolutionary and one-directional process whose climax would be represented by the characteristics of post-industrial societies. The references for these evaluations are thus external to the characteristics of Latin American societies, leaving them all behind in terms of their access to modernity, instead of trying to construct terms that will describe their own realities and recognize their characteristics and traits.

I prefer to go along with Brunner (1992) because he tries to settle this discussion by arguing that Latin America is modern, but with characteristics that derive from its particular insertion in the globalization process.

Brunner (1992) describes Latin American societies the following way:

The America we have, made of that crossing -many times destructive and painful- of traditions, cultures and dominations and also of exploitations, dependencies and servitude- is the America structured under the capitalist peripheral form of production, inserted in international markets; whose mass culture is articulated by the school, the institutions of knowledge and the communication media; and where the field of hegemonic struggles reflects the contradictory composition of such societies and the peculiar modalities of

constitution of their states (Brunner 1992:26*).

In this quote, Brunner (1992) includes some of the criteria that he considers indispensable in defining a country as modern. First of all, modernity is associated with capitalism, industrialization and democracy². In his argument for Latin American participation in modernity, Brunner (1992) indicates that modern societies are organized by four central institutions: the school, the industrial company, the markets, and certain phenomena of hegemony like consent and the predominance of corporations' interests, even in public affairs. Since Latin American countries are increasingly organized by these institutions, Brunner argues that they are in fact modern.

But their insertion in modernity has certain particularities which cannot be regarded as an incomplete or unfinished process of modernization, as Paz and Fuentes would argue, but as a different position than that of Western societies. Latin American societies play a fundamental role in the global economy by providing both better conditions for the establishment of transnational companies and cheap labour to central capitalist countries. A new colonialism is being established via the transference of resources through the payment of external debt and inequality of terms of international exchange, as well as through the return of benefits of foreign investment to their country of origin (Paris 1990).

In Mexico, economic modernization has meant an opening to transnational and to international markets, the liberalization of economy and the rationalization of

² In Mexico the first two are an incomplete reality although ancient forms of trade and labour organization also exist among certain social groups, and although agriculture has not been modernized in terms of technology and capital flow. Democracy, however, is a fiction, because the Mexican political system has not respected suffrage nor individual citizenship, apart that individualism has not dethroned strong group relationships and identities. Nevertheless, during the last two decades there has been an increase in social restlessness and civil participation that, for example, has forced the government to start designing and supporting the independent organization of national and local elections which were formerly under its complete control.

industries through the transfer of technology. By having national products competing with foreign products, exports are supposed to increase and foreign exchange can be used in order to pay the external debt and to finance economic growth (Paris 1990). Changes in legislation in order to attract foreign investment have been an important strategy to finance modernization of the State, which, by the way, is dramatically reducing its participation in the economy and becoming only a regulative institution. Privatization of once strategic industries has been a major source for financial flow. However, this model has failed mainly because of political instability and corruption within Government agencies, therefore impeding the expected benefits from these operations reaching the general population.

This process has meant the weakening of a strong corporative system, especially of unions, that had been the pillar of political stability since the Revolution in 1910, when the ever-ruling Revolutionary Institutional Party was founded. But, on the other hand, the Government has been forced to establish new relationships with organized social groups that have flourished during the last two decades and have brought together some of the most felt demands of the population.

Thus, even though the main characteristics of modern societies are present in Mexico and in other Latin American countries, the benefits they are supposed to receive are far from becoming real. For instance, between 1976 and 1997 Mexico's population saw a decrease of 71.4% in its purchasing power. While prices increased 102,770 percent during that period, the minimum wage increased only 29,369 percent (Vázquez 1997).

Although unemployment rates have decreased during the last year and a half, reaching 4.5% of the economically active population, this increase in labour participation has happened mainly in the informal sectors of economy, like small scale businesses and self-employed

activities that do not pay wages to their workers³. It is noteworthy that these areas represent mostly women's labour, as their effort to complement family income (García Guzmán 1994).

While 18.9% of the economically active population were earning less than the minimum wage in 1995, 65.1% did not receive any social benefits for their work in the same year (INEGI 1995a). In this context, labour rights like social security, retirement pensions and medical services are increasingly absent for the work force (García Guzmán 1994).

In the area of education, although it has been generalized and expanded, class differences make technical and professional training accessible only to middle and privileged groups so that they have the advantage when it comes to the labour market. Also, education is not the factor for social promotion it used to be because of the contraction of economy, so that the work expectations of young population that comes out of school cannot be satisfied.

For Mexico, modernization has meant the deepening of inequalities between a small group of wealthy and powerful families and a vast majority of workers and peasants that suffer an increasing poverty. In fact, more than 40 million people in the country live in conditions of poverty and 17 million of them are indigent (Pamplona, Monterrubio and Mejía 1993).

That world of opportunities socially imagined [in terms of education, health services, housing, technology and consumption] and individually desired does not correspond, however, with the actual structure of societies, nor with the world-order that digs a chasm between the developed countries and those in the periphery that are struggling for development (Brunner 1990:29*).

Brunner thus argues against those theoreticians that consider that Latin America is not modern because of the

³ Within the same period, the informal economy peaked to the 8% of the Internal Gross Product (Ortiz 1997).

conditions described above. Poverty, social exclusion and cultural heterogeneity do not make Mexico a traditional or premodern society, because they are in fact the products of its position in the inexorable process of world modernization⁴. Therefore, Mexican society is not modern in the same way as Western countries are, nor its process of incorporation to modernity is a simple copy of others.

For the purposes of this research, I will focus on the consequences of modernity for Latin American cultures, and especially for Mexican culture.

2. Cultural hybridity and modernity

Economic modernization does not automatically bring about cultural modernity. According to García Canclini (1990), although modernizing ideologies from past-century liberalism to the 1970's developmentalism made a clear-cut difference between tradition and modernity, the substitution of all other forms of production by capitalism has not happened in Latin America, nor have all other cultural expressions been eliminated by scientific knowledge or mass media. This is why I argue, along with this author, for a postmodern approach to understanding Latin American cultures, because in them there is a coexistence and articulation of traditions and modernities, of multiple developmental logics that can only be thought of as heterogeneity.

However, this coexistence of differences does not happen within a relationship of equality nor erases the power differential between cultures.

... in this time of postmodern dissemination and democratizing de-centralization, also grow the most concentrated forms of accumulation of power and

⁴ These problems cannot be considered exclusive to developing societies either, since they also exist in 'modern' countries. An example would be the increase in poverty and social exclusion produced by the gradual contraction of social programmes in the United States during the last decades, which particularly strike minorities like Hispanics and blacks.

transnational centralization of culture that mankind has ever known (García Canclini 1990:23*).

Drawing on Gramsci's theory of hegemony, García Canclini (1990) discusses what he calls the 'hybridity' of Latin American cultures, produced by a mixture of Indian traditions and Spanish Colonial Catholicism, on the one hand, and modern politics, education and communication on the other. This is an ongoing process in which hegemonic and subordinate classes interact and appropriate some of each other's cultural expressions in order to construct consent:

...it is the combination of all these elements (the philosophy of intellectuals, of popular masses, etc.) that culminates in a certain direction and in which this culmination becomes a rule of collective behavior, that is, it becomes concrete and complete (integral) 'history' (Gramsci 1975:30*).

That is, the historic effectiveness of a class' world-view is verified by the support of other classes and by its adoption as their own conception of the world. But, although power relationships radiate this process, this adoption is neither total nor monolithic but, rather, subordinate classes make a selective appropriation of hegemonic groups' cultural models, objects and behaviors. In turn, these groups are themselves interested in subordinate classes' traditions if only as a historical referent or as a symbolic resource (García Canclini 1990).

In Mexico, for example, peasants that migrate to the United States or to the cities, find their adherence to local cultures an obstacle to participation in urban life. Thus, they have to incorporate information from mass cultures in order to understand urban codes, to act correctly in the new conditions, to step out from isolation and to stop feeling 'inferior'. Thus, television becomes a 'handbook of urbanity' (García Canclini 1988:475).

Another example of this process in Mexico is that, frequently, crafts production maintains forms of

organization that could be traced to prehispanic times, as is the case of the workshop as part of family life. However, Mexican artisans selectively change their designs in accordance to urban or even international tastes, but resist other forms of work organization like collective workshops or salaried basis, where the unity between work and family would be broken.

It is problematic to say that cultural modernity has been substituting and eliminating tradition, as if it were an evolutionary process, and that tradition is only present among Indian and rural groups in Mexico while modernity belongs to urban, educated classes. I resort to Rowe and Schelling's (1991) critical view of this issue to inform my position:

Latin American modernity is not a replica of US or European mass culture, but has a distinctive character which varies from country to country. A major factor in its difference -probably the major factor- is popular culture. It is a modernity which does not necessarily entail the elimination of pre-modern traditions, but has arisen through them, transforming them in the process (Rowe and Schelling 1991:4).

So, although the Mexican project recognizes our ethnic inheritance, it does so by subordinating it to the unifying intentions of modernization, expressed by the powerful political nationalism that has been promoted by all Governments since the Revolution. Several social processes have contributed to the construction of such a national stereotype and culture, among them urbanization⁵, migration -both to the cities and to the United States-, tourism, secularization and the electronic media. Therefore, rural, peasant and indigenous cultures cannot be considered anymore as closed structures that have retained their characteristics over time. Rather, they interact and coexist in different ways even within urban settings. In fact, the urbanization process mentioned

⁵ In the last decades, Latin American cities came to contain between 60% and 70% of the whole population of the countries (García Canclini 1990:203).

above has taken the form of massive migration and formation of shantytowns around main cities, with the consequent absence of infrastructure for this population. Besides the fact that this shows the failure of industry to absorb the migrant peasantry, rural population that come to the cities tends to group and gather reproducing their own cultures within the new setting. This produces a particular mixture or, rather, a simultaneity of cultural expressions irreducible to the duality tradition-modernity.

The methodological consequences of this approach to Latin American cultures are far reaching. García Canclini (1988) criticizes two approaches to the problem: deductivism, which ascribes absolute powers to modes of production and considers populations as passive, granting no autonomy to popular cultures; and inductivism, that identifies the popular with the traditional, the peasants and the Indians, giving them innate qualities that seem impermeable to cultural contact, as if communities were isolated from macrosocial processes. This latter approach builds a nostalgic folklore that, instead of helping to respect and preserve local cultures as different and relatively autonomous, has been used in order to integrate them to national culture, appropriating them mainly in favour of the modernizing project of hegemonic groups.

The answers are beginning to emerge in those anthropological studies which go beyond the traditional and atomized conception of the popular, locating the indigenous and marginal groups in macrosocial structures and processes (García Canclini 1988:478).

Those studies that would approach precisely the areas of conflict between classes and cultures, showing the complex interaction that modernity is producing in Latin American countries, would be particularly helpful. To look at conflict within culture involves acknowledging the power differentials that prevent the subordinate classes from having a real possibility of determining by

themselves the global changes that they are facing.

If we consider that this hybridity of culture is present among all areas of social life, sexuality is also a cultural construction affected and shaped by this process and needs to be addressed within this wider process of transformation. One of the most important processes of modernity is that pertains to the social construction of sexuality in Mexico is the secularization of social life, which I will address next.

3. Secularization in Mexico.

The relationship between secularization and sexuality is fundamental to this thesis because sexuality has traditionally been a normative concern for the Church⁶, but during this century this situation has changed because of the need by national Governments to control reproduction and to administer the population, especially in developing countries, where its growth seems to pose a certain threat to developed countries. Sexuality is thus included in such preoccupations, albeit in a marginal way.

Secularization is, as said above, a crucial part of modernity and it has its roots in the Enlightenment project of rationality. As García Canclini (1990) indicates:

...secularization made social norms come down from heaven to earth, from sacred ritual to every day debate... (García Canclini 1990:152*).

Such a project was imported to America through the colonizing endeavors of European countries, albeit in very different ways. As argued by Paz (1979) while Anglo-Saxon America inherited the critical ideas of the eighteenth century Europe and the Reformation, Hispanic America was heir to the Catholic universal monarchy and

⁶ I speak of a single Church because 80% of the Mexicans declare they are Catholics. (Blancarte 1993:170).

the Counter-reformation, thus producing a process of secularization with different characteristics than that of Western countries, and nurtured by the presence of Indian cultures as well.

According to Blancarte (1993), Mexico has been going through a process of secularization since the beginning of the nineteenth century, in which the movement of liberal Reform established the legal separation of Church and State, thus promoting the laicisation of social life, that is, the autonomy of social from religious institutions. Besides this separation in terms of public institutions, there has been a distancing of the believers from the doctrinal norms of the Church and an individualization of the belief system, in which the normative power of the Church has been weakened by the gradual appropriation of moral evaluation by individuals, instead of granting this prerogative to an external entity.

Blancarte (1993) argues that Mexican society has been secularized because:

If we understand secularization as a process in which the religious is marginalised to the private sphere and in which believers consider that certain aspects are not the matter of the religious institution, but of their free consciousness, then we could say that the anti-clericalism of the Mexican people is the evidence of the strong presence of a secular symbolic system in Mexico (Blancarte 1993:168*).

This process of making religion a private matter seems particularly strong regarding sexuality and reproduction. Even though the Catholic Church teaches against the use of modern contraceptives, 73.9% of the subjects interviewed in a recent survey (Excélsior 1990) were in favour of contraception, and 18.7% answered that it was a private decision. Abortion, which is emphatically forbidden by the Church, was considered by 41.9% of the interviewees to be a decision that depends on each case, thus questioning its universal prohibition.

This autonomy from the normative role of the Church

does not mean, however, that Catholic morals have disappeared from the social construction of sexuality in Mexico. Rather, they seem to have become 'lay theories' because they have been separated from their religious origins and reconstructed as a secular moral system⁷.

The secularization of social life has brought about new developments in terms of the surveillance of sexual behavior and desire because, while before they were regulated by the Church's representatives, modernity is now fostering self-autonomy and pushing toward individual choice. What remains to be seen is if the social, cultural and material conditions for this exercise are possible in Mexican present situation.

4. The history of sexuality in Mexico

Given the hybridity of Mexican culture discussed above, and considering that the social construction of sexuality is presently a heterogeneous process, it is important to describe the different discourses that have constructed it along different epochs, because many of their elements survive today, although transformed by history. The existence of such discourses does not mean that they were constantly obeyed (Gruzinski 1979), as shown by the records there are of the actual sexual behavior of the Mexicans of other historical periods.

In this section I will briefly discuss the literature about dominant discourses of sexuality in four epochs of the history of Mexico:

- Prehispanic cultures
- The Colonial period
- The nineteenth century
- Contemporary Mexico

The amount of studies and information regarding each

⁷ This process of secularization of sexual moral values will be illustrated through participants' accounts in Chapter V: **The moral dimension of sexuality: evil, the sacred and rituals of sexual initiation.**

of these periods is quite uneven. For instance, discourses of sexuality in the nineteenth century newly-born Mexican nation have been scarcely looked at, while the studies of the clash between Indian and European cultures during the Colonial period (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries) has been widely analyzed. This situation will inevitably be reflected in this section.

4.1. Prehispanic cultures.

Before I discuss the literature on prehispanic conceptions of sexual activity, I need to warn that the application of the concept of sexuality (as a thing-in-itself) to descriptions of indigenous beliefs and practices is an enterprise of dubious success because, as said above, this is a concept that was born in the eighteenth century in Europe, and that has been constitutive of modern subjectivity, but that was not valid for prehispanic cultures.

Also, most of the information we now have about sexual practices and meanings of prehispanic peoples comes from records and descriptions prepared by Spanish missionaries, and from codex that have been interpreted by modern archaeologists (Legros 1982). Nevertheless, I shall discuss the elements that historians have called sexual when studying the sources of Indian history, which relate mainly to eroticism, sexual behaviors, gender and reproduction.

For prehispanic Mesoamerican cultures, the body was not separated from its natural environment or from the whole cosmos but it was open to the exchange of fluids, vapors and matter with the 'outside', and it interacted constantly as a part of the natural and supernatural worlds. For instance, in ancient Nahua and Mayan, the words that could be similar to our concept of body - **tonacayo**, our mass of flesh (López Austin 1989:172*)- are the same words used for corn, which was considered the

origin of man and woman, their main source of nutrition and, therefore, the very matter of their bodies, thus making a sort of equivalence between corn and man (López Austin 1989, Ruz 1996).

According to several studies (See for example, López Austin 1989 and 1996, Quezada 1989, Ruz 1996, Marcos 1989) sexual activity, eroticism and reproduction were considered gifts from the gods to compensate the mortals in order to make their suffering and pain of this world bearable for them. Just as hardship was considered a part of life itself, so were the scarce pleasures available to earthly beings by the grace of the gods.

Pleasures were divine gifts. The gods were happy when man made the most of these goods, which made him forget his sadness momentarily; but these were very limited goods, and they had been sent for the enjoyment of all mankind. They were scanty and just as their enjoyment was allowed, their abuse caused the wrath of the gods (López Austin 1989:279*).

Among these goods and consolations were sexual pleasures and the joy of procreation. Therefore, sexual activity, desire and eroticism were not considered as sinful, as they are in Catholicism. In fact, among the Nahuas there were two divinities that represented what we now call sexuality who, by the way, were both female. **Xochiquetzal** was the goddess of flowers. She was the patroness of ritual sexual intercourse and she protected ritual prostitutes as well as love relationships, whether legitimate or not. **Tlazoltéotl** was the goddess of sensuality. She also protected midwives and pregnant women. Both these goddesses received confession from their believers (Quezada 1989, Marcos 1989).

However, this does not mean that sexual practices were not regulated among prehispanic civilizations. For instance, the absence of sexual intercourse was thought to cause harm, because the energy that was not liberated led to organic imbalance, but its excess was considered to produce weakness precisely because of a waste of vital energy (López Austin 1989). This is why, although

excesses were punished, celibacy, infertility and homosexuality were also morally deplorable. Thus, the idea of a middle ground for sexual satisfaction was prevalent, praising the joys of sex but also recognizing the value of chastity.

The worth of sexual abstinence was instilled differently among social classes. While the moral value of chastity was not instilled strongly among common people, it was particularly rigid among noble young men who would later become priests. Their sexual behavior was of public importance because repeated intercourse was considered to decrease the priests' energy needed for rituals in which the collective good was asked from the gods.

The exhausted and the impure damaged the ritual that attempted to get a public benefit, and such harm to collective interests made him deserve a rigorous punishment (López Austin 1989:348*).

Chastity was also recommended among young men and women, but for different reasons. In the case of men, because it was believed that their seed was given to the woman and that it was exhausted by premature intercourse. Therefore, the earlier sexual initiation was, the earlier their sexual life would end. Also, it was believed that premature sexual activity produced a slowing down of physical growth and of the development of intelligence. This conception is exemplified in the next **huehuetlatolli**⁸:

Listen, my son: thus is the world of reproduction, of the multiplication of people. **Toque Nahuaque** determined to send a woman, a man. But do not lose yourself hastily, do not throw yourself on your head as a dog would, do not fall on your head and hair over the things of sex (López Austin 1989:331*).

Thus, what was morally reproachable was the excess of intercourse, because it implied risks. For example,

⁸ **Huehuetlatollis** were traditional discourses spoken in solemn occasions that often included advice from the old to the young on how to conduct their sexual life. Catholic missionaries later used this form of speech for the purposes of evangelization, because they proved to be highly effective in transmitting Catholic precepts to the Indians (López Austin 1989).

man's loss of semen would cause also the loss of his body's grease, making him too thin and weak to work and fight (Quezada 1989).

In the case of the woman, she did not expel her supposed seminal liquid as the man did and she was therefore considered insatiable (López Austin 1989). The following excerpt taken from a missionary's description of a trial of old women charged with adultery shows this conception:

...when you get old, you men stop wanting carnal delectation, because you had too much of it when you were young, because potency and human seed stop; but us women never get satiated, nor do we get bored of this deed, because our body is like an abyss and like a deep ravine that is never fed up, it receives everything they throw into it and wants more and asks for more, and if this we not do, we have no life (Sahagún in Legros 1982:235*)

There were negative consequences concerning the loss of virginity for a young woman, because she was expected to spend her whole sexual life with only one man, her husband. Female virginity was announced after marriage, and its lack was a cause for repudiation. But even in cases where her husband did not repudiate her, she would be unhappy because he would always doubt her faithfulness (Quezada 1989). Young women also refrained from losing their virginity because they were brought to believe that they would suffer a divine punishment that would cause their flesh to rot (López Austin 1989).

One of the most interesting beliefs about intercourse is its relation to a supernatural being -the **tonalli**- that every individual had. The **tonalli** was a spiritual entity that was responsible for the relationship between the divinity and the individual, and its status was expressed through luck. It also accounted for the temperament and the vigor of the soul. It was believed that the **tonalli** came out of the body during illness, drunkenness, involuntary ejaculation and sexual intercourse. In fact, the **tonallis** of the lovers were thought to embrace each other during coitus. In order for

the **tonalli** to come back safely to the body -both male and female-, it was necessary to have an orgasm -and an ejaculation in the case of men- so that the previous balance could be restored before it could peacefully enter the body again. A sudden interruption of intercourse -because of fright or of coitus interruptus- could cause the **tonalli** to lose its way back and therefore endanger the health and well being of its bearer.

This construction had a different implication in relation to social class, as said above. Among noble young men, excess was more rigorously punished because they needed all their spiritual strength, that is, their **tonalli** intact, in order to be superior to the common people, whose frequent sexual acts would cause an incessant exit of this spiritual entity, weakening them (López Austin 1989).

As can be deduced from these examples, this system of beliefs and moral values speaks of a society that was concerned with the administration of their population. Adultery, rape, homosexuality and abortion were severely punished, often with death, while conjugal and filial love was highly encouraged. This indicates that Mesoamerican cultures valued sexual activity with moderation, and encouraged reproduction only within 'valid' institutions like marriage.

This brief description of prehispanic ideas about sexuality does not intend to be exhaustive, because even among Mesoamerican cultures there were differences regarding class, gender and historical periods. But, in any case, it provides an overview of the main constructions that are relevant to this study.



4.2. The Colonial period⁹.

The colonizing endeavour of the Spanish had to find strategies to know the Indians' concepts of the body and sexual activity, in order to be able to introduce Catholic precepts that could allow for an imposition of their religion. As said above, among these ancient cultures sexual pleasure was not regarded as a sin **per se**, although excesses were not allowed. These cultures' complex systems of rules, taboos and prescriptions regarding sexual activity were not related to the notion of the flesh as decay and obstacle for the redemption of the soul, as they were in Catholicism.

Many authors have documented the process of evangelization regarding sexuality (See for example, Viqueira 1984, González Marmolejo 1987, Gruzinski 1987, Alberro and Gruzinski 1979, Lavrín 1989a) because it is precisely within the missionaries' confessionals that historians have found the richest material regarding what we now call sexuality. From these accounts I draw diverse examples of the process of clash between cultures in which, although Indian beliefs were not completely destroyed, their survival depended upon their ability to resist or even coexist with the violent imposition of Catholicism.

Many historians describe the encounter between the Mesoamerican and the Spanish Catholic cosmologies, which did not conceive nor addressed sexual practice in the same manner, and thus needed a kind of dialogue (although not in equal circumstances at all) between them. Supported by the military strength of their armies, this sort of dialogue was necessary if the Spanish intended to spread their religion among the Indians. Legros (1982)

⁹ Most of the historical research there is about sexuality during colonial times comes from the work of the **Seminario de Historia de las Mentalidades** of the **Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia**, which was a group of historians that worked during the last years of the 1970's and the beginning of the 1980's on the process of evangelization, especially regarding sexuality.

questions the idea that there was a monolithic and coherent model of Catholicism brought by the Spanish and indicates that the conquerors also transformed their conceptions of the world as they lived among prehispanic civilizations. These mutual transformation was not based on a true dialogue because, even though the Indian peoples showed curiosity for the Spanish, neither of them recognized the alterity of the other. This was particularly evident in the process of evangelization in which missionaries did not speak native languages and used translators, or even mimics, to preach:

...the evangelization endeavor was characterized by the absence of 'sense'. Attitudes, gestures, behavior, words were taught, but what they meant and why they were necessary was not taught (Legros 1982:225*).

Furthermore, even though some of the missionaries finally could speak these languages, they did not take into account that the concepts they wanted to convey to the Indians could not be understood as they intended, because Indian peoples did not share them.

This basic misunderstanding can be exemplified in the difficulties missionaries found when trying to translate Catholic concepts into local languages. For instance, according to Ruz (1996), in the case of the evangelization of Mayan cultures, Spanish missionaries chose the word **mulil** that designates carnal pleasure strictly speaking, as a vehicle to introduce to the Tzeltales [Mayan] the Christian concept of evil or sin. Thus, concepts of transgression and immorality were cast in the mould of sexual delight (Ruz 1996:117*).

Gruzinski (1987) offers another example that comes from the translation of Catholic precepts to Nahua words:

...in order to stress the degrading character of pleasure, the augustine [Molina] resorts to a series of eschatological classifications and comparisons that become almost obsessive. The sin of the flesh is ranked equally to filthiness (**catzauac**, **catzualiztli**), to mud (**coquitl**), to pus (**temalli**), to urine and feces (**axistli**, **nemanauilli**)... (Gruzinski 1987:192*).

But the difficulties of this colonizing endeavor were not confined to language and to the concepts they embodied. They were spread over all aspects of social life, of which sexuality was only one.

This translation of Western religion into Amerindian culture could not have been accomplished without the help of Indian 'servants of the Church' (Gruzinski 1982:196*) who were a key element in the introduction of Christian marriage among Indian populations. Obvious continuities between prehispanic and the Catholic conceptions of marriage helped to impose the latter, like the emphasis on procreation, the condemnation of abortion, homosexuality and adultery, and the importance of female virginity (Gruzinski 1982). What was alien, however, was the idea of eternal chastity as a virtue, because for Indian cultures sexual pleasure was necessary for this life, and they only forbade it in certain circumstances.

There were numerous resistances on the part of Indians. For example, polygamy was a frequent practice among noble men, and it could not be easily eradicated because, in order for Indians to accept the monogamic model of Christian marriage, the missionaries had to convince them that polygamy was against divine precepts. Besides the affection noblemen could feel for their wives, these women were also necessary to carry out chores for the household. In any case, the priests found it necessary to try to sort out which of the present wives was to become the legitimate one, and also facing the problem of endogamic practices in Indian cultures which the Church considered incestuous, like the marriage of a widower to his sister-in-law (Viqueira 1984). The abusive and promiscuous behavior of the Spanish did not help to impose the model either. In fact, Indians who were accused of polygamy often defended themselves by arguing that they were only following the Spanish' example (Gruzinski 1982).

Later in the Colonial period, the migration of

Spanish women into the Colonies brought about a rapid and profound process of ethnic mixing between whites, Indians and black slaves whose sexual relations were not always legitimized by marriage.

But while theologians discussed the validity of Indian marriage, consensual unions among the three main ethnic groups flourished and began producing a **mestizo** population that became the demographic majority by the seventeenth century (Lavrín 1989a:4).

Thus, ancient legitimate polygamy was transformed into different forms of illegitimate unions, both among Spanish and Indian populations. The rape of Indian women by Spanish conquerors was a constant practice, and sometimes becoming pregnant by a white man and having white children was the only survival strategy for Indian women.

These inconsistencies between Catholic normative sexual discourse and the actual sexual practices of the population are widely documented by Lavrín (1989b) in her analysis both of confessionals and of cases brought to judges of Colonial Mexico. The most documented transgressions were consensual unions, bigamy, sexual witchcraft, and the soliciting of sexual favours in confessionals (Lavrín 1989b).

Throughout all this period of colonization, imposition and resistance struggled with one another, but there was a subtle and effective process of undermining indigenous group culture and identity, through confession and marriage. In prehispanic forms of marriage, priests were consulted about the compatibility of the **tonalli** and about the fate of the couple, in order to foresee and prevent any possibilities of failure. Marriage was a public ritual in which the whole social group participated. Since Christian marriage was based on the free will of the participants, the influence of the group in the alliances decreased considerably, 'privatizing' marriage by including only the couple and the priest (Gruzinski 1989). This strategy was one of the ways in

which the strength of Indian groups was weakened in favour of individual choice, therefore fostering a one-to-one relationship with the most powerful institution of the time: the Church.

According to Gruzinski (1989), confession was the main tool that the Catholic church used in New Spain to introduce what Foucault (1981) calls 'sexuality device', that is, a whole technology of the flesh and the body through introspection, guilt, self-policing and disclosure not only of sexual practices, but of desires, sensations and thoughts. The acceptance of the concept of sin rests upon the existence of a knowledgeable individual whose free will allows him/her to choose between good and evil (Lavrin 1989b). Thus, this power strategy called for an individualization of the penitents, in this case of the Indians, who found the assumption of personal responsibility completely alien to them because, in their cosmology, fate, witchcraft and even luck traced their path in life. Needless to say, these beliefs were also part of a collective culture strongly bonded through ritual, tradition, language and territory. Gruzinski (1989) sees a process of 'Westernization' in this strategy:

In other words, by centering on the 'subject' -in the Western meaning of the word- the interrogation of the confession breaks down the ancient solidarity and social networks, as well as the physical and supernatural ties. Thus, the belief in a family force, related to the **tonalli** (fate) and vital to the cohesion of the group and the well being of the family components, all but disappears (Gruzinski 1989:98).

In this view, confession was not only the gateway for Catholic religion, but for a whole different conceptualization of the person, in terms of free will and individual responsibility, that was absent from indigenous culture. This does not mean, however, that such endeavor was totally successful, both because of Indian resistance -in the form of 'apparent' obedience to Church rules- and because the Spanish themselves did not

participate fully in the subjective effects of the scientific and religious revolutions brought about by the Reformation¹⁰.

Indigenous resistance was also expressed in dramatic ways, from collective suicide and the reluctance to reproduce in the face of the destruction of all their ways of life (Alberro 1979) to strategies by which natives introduced and transformed their gods and cults into Catholic rituals and images (Legros 1982).

The image of the Virgin of **Guadalupe** is particularly relevant to this study, both because it illustrates the process of the construction of a national Mexican identity, and because it shows certain prescriptions of gender, female sexuality and virginity that came to be hegemonic. **Guadalupe** is a virgin whose name came originally from Spain, but who appeared in central Mexico in 1531, ten years following the victory of the Spanish conquest (Nebel 1995). Her illustrations show a dark-skinned, **mestizo** virgin that came to be the main emblem of Mexican national identity. Her sanctuary was erected in the same place where the Indians held pilgrimages and worshipped the goddess **Tonantzin Cihuacóatl**, 'our revered mother the woman serpent' who was the procreator of gods and humans (Nebel 1995:23*). When discussing how these images have been used throughout history in order to construct Mexican nationalism, Bartra (1987) describes some aspects of this legend:

The same way that the long shadow of guilt which Eve projects never abandons Mary, the ancient **Tonantzin** never detaches herself from **Guadalupe**. The ancient mother of gods and men, with a primitive sensuality that is seen by Christianity as the specter of sin and inherited guilt, never stop haunting Mexican females and, by extension, the Virgin of **Guadalupe** herself (Bartra 1987:214*).

¹⁰ Morse (1982) argues that Spain resisted the objective intellectualization and rationalization of the world produced by such revolutions. In fact, there is a certain 'greater warmth of human relations in Iberoamerica' founded in the fact that 'otherness' did not defeat 'fraternity' completely (Morse 1982:149*).

But there is also a female image that became central to the construction of femininity and female sexuality in Mexican culture: that of **La Malinche**, an Indian woman who was taken by Hernán Cortés as both translator and lover, a sexual union from which the first **mestizo** -the first **mexicano**- was born. Instead of acknowledging that she supported the Spanish as a rebellion against the oppression of other indigenous peoples -the tenochcas-, official history describes **La Malinche** as a traitor to her nation, although that nation -Mexico- did not even exist then (Bartra 1987). In this vision, she is a sexual creature whose seductive condition brought doom to her civilization.

This duality **Guadalupe-La Malinche** constitutes the two faces of female sexuality that have remained emblematic for Mexican culture ever since: the mother, pure and virgin, and the whore, voluptuous and treacherous. The imagery linked to this duality has served as a local translation of the traditional Catholic split of female sexuality into Eve and Mary. These two kinds of women represent opposite images of different moral value and have served as normative for the construction of gender. More recent aspects and forms of this duality will be discussed further on, as they were transformed along different historical periods. By the end of the Colonial period (i.e., the last decades of the eighteenth century) Spain and its Colonies began a long process of secularization that:

...substitutes the evangelizing goals of the Renaissance and baroque times, for the language of civilization and productivity (Bernard and Gruzinski 1988:198*).

Summarizing, the Colonial period was a time of cultural and racial mixing in which the imposition of Catholic sexual morals, marriage practices and concepts of sin was not a linear process, because it came neither from a monolithic model of sexuality, nor was received passively by Indian populations. This process of struggle

and transformation resulted in today's Mexican hybrid culture.

4.3. The nineteenth century.

The richness of studies of sexuality in prehispanic and Colonial times contrasts drastically with their almost total absence regarding the nineteenth century. There are only a few studies on gender, marriage and family during that time, but they do not address sexuality as such (Tuñón 1991, Rocha 1991, Bernard and Gruzinski 1988, Gonzalbo 1991).

However, the social, political and cultural context of independent Mexico in 1821 could shed light on the conditions in which the construction of sexuality happened during that period. First of all, Mexico was a newly born nation that struggled to construct a national State and society amidst slow economic growth, political instability and foreign invasions. The ideas of the Enlightenment were penetrating slowly into the political arena, and the importance of the normative function of the State was increasing. The protection of the Church by the Crown was lost with the independence movement and the Mexican Government was a new entity with which the Church had to negotiate.

The rise of liberalism and the movement of **Reforma** in 1867 inaugurated a strong animosity between the Church and the Mexican State that resulted in a formal and legal separation between them. Thus, the religious institution lost much of its economic base and a new anticlerical attitude was developed among certain sectors of society, which would last up to our days (Bernard and Gruzinski 1988).

However, the contents of moral codes did not change as radically as the normative status of Church and State. Rather, conservative notions of gender were secularized and reinforced.

The nineteenth century is also the performance of minorities fighting each other and preaching freedom of cult or return to monarchy, but they unite around this: they keep external fidelity to their legitimate wives, they see purity in conjugal love and nameless frenzy in pleasure (Monsiváis 1995:185*).

This process does not mean that Catholicism lost its influence in society, because vast sectors of the population remained close to the clergy. While liberalism was spreading among minorities in the cities, religion was still strong in rural areas. So, while the Church lost most of its political power, it remained a very influential institution regarding sexual values and norms.

Influenced by the authoritarianism of the Enlightenment, the incipient modern Mexican State tried to penetrate into the private space and customs of individuals. As said before, this meant a relative change in the locus of sexual normativity from the Church to the State. Examples of this trend of modern politics are the creation of civil marriage without the need of the sanction of the Church and a change in the legal status of sexual behaviors that were considered deviant.

However, the process of secularization of sexuality was not linear. In spite of the commitment of the Mexican State to become completely lay, Catholic ideas regarding sexuality and reproduction dominated policy design. A clear illustration of this is the prohibition of contraception and abortion during this period, and the rationale behind legal considerations of sexuality, here described by Suárez (1994):

Enlightened modernity was trying to impose a 'new moral order'; new because of its severity, not because its prescriptions were novel. It framed, classified and marked in order to call the population to order, discipline and morality. The practice of non-allowed sexualities was an assault against God, but at the same time it represented social danger, and thus new and multiple discourses were pronounced (Suárez 1994:225*).

A penal code was elaborated for punishing sexual practices that were considered criminal, among them homosexuality, prostitution, adultery, consensual unions and bigamy, and sentences varied from deportation and expulsion, to marks on the body. Monetary penalties were imposed, for instance, in the cases of rape or when the woman's virginity had been lost under marriage oath so that the union could not be carried out (Suárez 1994).

During the past century, the notion of decency became the main category by which individuals' sexual behavior was measured, especially women's, and it was directly related to female virginity before marriage, discretion and life monogamy. The religious conception of chastity as a permanent and ideal state gradually gave way to the value of female virginity only before marriage (Tuñón 1991).

At the same time, there was a strong emphasis on the image of woman as the pillar of the family and the home, and of her roles as nurse and teacher for the children, as well as of her support for the husband-supplier. The supposed value of reproductive function was strengthened by the construction of the myth of the Mexican mother as a self-sacrificing and generous woman for whom motherhood was a matter of instinct, not of choice¹¹. The construction of this image went along with its counterpart: the impure whore, which was applied often to unmarried, single or separated women whose lack of relationship with a man was thought to let their untamed sexuality loose.

According to Bartra, such a split of the female image was supported by the myths of **Guadalupe** and **La Malinche**, mentioned earlier¹², which by the time had been transformed and used effectively in the construction of a

¹¹ However widespread this cult of the mother was, it is important to note that paternal authority was not granted to the mother, but only to the father (Tuñón 1991).

¹² See 4.2. **The Colonial period**, above in this same chapter.

discourse of national identity.

[After independence] a complex myth about the Mexican woman is codified gradually: a tender and raped entity, protective and lubricous, sweet and treacherous, maternal virgin and babilonic female. It is the indigenous past, subjugated and docile, within whose depths live who-knows-what idolatrous lusts. **Guadalupe** and **La Malinche** as two facets of the same image: this is the woman deserved by the Mexican male that was invented by national culture (Bartra 1987:219*).

Such images, which are a local translation of the Christian Eve-Mary duality, have served in the construction of the meaning of female sexuality that pervades Mexican culture even today.

By the end of the nineteenth century there were deep transformations in the political and economic structures of Mexico, that paved the way to the modernization of the country. The social stability imposed by Porfirio Díaz' dictatorship, which lasted 33 years, allowed for the start of a new economic project based on foreign investment. Industrialization and urbanization coexisted with huge rural **haciendas** dedicated to agriculture. But this long period of stability also produced profound social contradictions that finally exploded in the Revolution of 1910.

During this time, the spread of liberalism's ideas provided the basis for new and more modern discourses on women's status, like the pronunciation of the first feminist conventions in Yucatán in 1916 and 1917, which demanded sex education, suffrage for women, health services, birth control, voluntary divorce, equality between the sexes within marriage, and the social recognition of natural children. These first Mexican feminists stressed:

...the need to rip women of fanaticism and prepare them for progress, as well as to demonstrate that sexual instinct also reigns in women (Rocha 1990, in Rodríguez, Corona and Pick 1996:352*).

However, these ideas of gender equality did not permeate all areas of women's lives. They were still

confined to the domestic sphere and their sexuality was still invested with conservative values and norms like the exaltation of motherhood as women's main contribution to social life. Even the Women's Movement of the time considered the importance of the participation of women in public affairs only to improve their role within the household.

Woman as wife and mother is the starting and final point to which all women have to aspire; to be a granddaughter, daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, are phases of her life cycle which led to an only destiny locked up in the 'eternal feminine' (Rocha 1991:16*).

This praise of the image of the housewife denied the existence of female sexual pleasure in favour of her reproductive function. Such a strategy was part of the process by which the extended family and its function as a production unit, was intended to be substituted by the nuclear, consumer family -based upon the heterosexual couple and their children- in accordance to the image of the bourgeois family.

At the same time, male sexuality had been constructed as an uncontrollable force that needed immediate expression and for which women were objects of satisfaction. Male dominance favored men having several sexual relationships at the same time, without really breaking any rules. Apart from a legitimate wife with which sexual desire and passion were not acceptable because of her virginal and maternal nature, men could have both casual encounters and stable relationships within which eroticism could be expressed. Among the middle and upper classes, sometimes these stable relationships became families themselves, that the man had to support as well.

But these practices did not impact in the same manner upon rural and urban, indigenous or **mestizo**, middle class or proletarian families. According to Monsiváis (1995):

The sexuality of upper classes is, officially, the

territory of silence and respect; something is said about what happens among middle classes, and well into the twentieth century, little is known about the sexuality of majorities, whose appetites and repressions are not a matter for the Good People and, thus, are not documented. Foreseeably, sexual relations among popular classes are more 'natural' (less dependent on gossip)... (Monsiváis 1995:186*).

Thus, the previous century was characterized by the construction of heterosexuality as the natural sexuality, and the conjugal bond was defined as the only space for its legitimate expression. This does not mean, however, that individuals always obeyed such norms. Along with such moral discourses, prostitution, consensual unions, homosexuality and single motherhood were constant practices among the population.

4.4. Contemporary Mexico

In contrast to the previous sections, the following description of dominant discourses of sexuality in contemporary Mexico has been based upon both primary sources and field studies, because the former are easily available and can be analyzed directly, while discourses from other periods required historical literature.

However, it is important to stress that, just as it is the case for the previous century, there are few historical studies of sexuality in the present century (see for example, Rocha 1994, Monsiváis 1995). In fact, according to Liguori and Szasz (1996), research on sexuality in Mexico started scarcely ten years ago because of the emergence of AIDS as a public health problem, and most of the studies produced since do not focus on historical considerations, but on issues that build on the present conception of sexuality as a health risk.

The few references that look historically at sexuality speak of profound changes in sexual culture throughout the century, even though such transformations

are not evenly experienced among all social groups. Monsiváis (1995) describes such transitions as follows:

From the irresponsibility of lavishing children to the reticence of the condom. From the urge to support the lover [**querida**] and her offspring to the preoccupation of limiting oneself to cover the quota of two children... From the loss of virginity as the semisacred and semidemoniacal entrance to the condition of being a woman, to the first sexual contact as an obvious step... Few remember the strictly reproductive function of sexuality, as ordered by the Catholic Church. And the fear of AIDS disciplines the desire for promiscuity (Monsiváis 1995:186*).

These examples show the process of the secularization of sexuality that has already been described, which during this century has come to be pervasive in lay dominant discourses.

What follows is a brief discussion of the contents of contemporary discourses on sexuality that compete to become dominant and that constitute the context and cultural resources with which individuals are constructing meaning about their sexual practices. For the purpose of argument, I will describe some aspects and the relative importance of the following contemporary discourses and their channels:

- i) Formal education and science in the school**
- ii) The Church**
- iii) The Government: health and population policies**
- iv) Social actors: feminism, gay and lesbian movements and right-wing groups.**
- v) The media**

- i) Formal education and science in the school.**

According to Monsiváis (1995), in Mexico the most important battlefield between rigid tradition and new scientific discourses has been sex education. Since the end of the previous century and the beginning of the present, lay public schools started to be established both in cities and in rural areas. At first their impact

was very limited because, at least in the provinces, schools were received with ambivalence, since they represented both a means of social promotion and a threat to the cohesion and values of traditional rural families, to which Catholic sexual morals were precious.

In fact, at school the child learns norms and values of the national society. The 'bourgeois' ideal -or 'revolutionary' in Mexico- is incarnated by the **mestizo** and urban world, and by everything that can make one forget one's ownership to an old-fashioned, 'underdeveloped' and 'ignorant' world (Bernard and Gruzinski 1988:206*).

In 1933 some groups of the civil society started to pressure the Government in order to implement a sex education programme in schools, since they considered that families were reticent to inform young people about sexuality. These groups used premarital pregnancy, venereal diseases and 'sexual perversion' as arguments in favour of the need for the programme. But they were confronted by conservative and right-wing movements of parents who asserted their right to be the exclusive sex educators of their children. The discussion was so strong and bitter that it finally forced the Minister of Education to resign and the programme was stopped (Rodríguez 1996).

The following decades did not offer the necessary social conditions for sex education to be given at schools, but new images of men and women brought by the media during the 1950's sent messages about sexual practices and pleasures, related to the new culture of individualism and consumption.

It was not until 1974 (the year in which the Government established its first explicit population policy) that sex education -which really concerned education for reproduction- was again included in the school system (Rodríguez, Corona and Pick 1996).

Presently, the style of sex education in schools is mainly informational and instrumental, rather than formative (Camarena 1996). Included in Natural Science

textbooks of 5th and 6th grades, the concepts conveyed come from a biological perspective of sexuality, which intends to foster the acceptance of family planning policies. Thus, the emphasis is still on reproduction and on sexual practices as risky, both in terms of health and unwanted pregnancy.

In elementary school, the contents of textbooks include sexual physical maturation, the human body and hygiene, and the structure and function of the female and male reproductive systems. However, it is interesting that, although these books discuss fertilization, they do not include any mention of sexual intercourse, nor the possible ways to prevent unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted diseases. This is one of the main criticisms about these texts and programmes; that they do not talk about AIDS before 7th grade, a time by which many young people have left school and have therefore lost an important preventive opportunity (Camarena 1996, Rodríguez 1994). Needless to say, such an approach does not educate on the matters of pleasure, satisfaction and growth that sexuality can provide.

From 7th grade on, sexuality is covered by the subjects of Civil Education and Biology. In the first case, contents relate to human rights, children's and women's rights, solidarity, tolerance and health as a right and as an obligation, trying to approach sexuality in an open manner and without preconceptions. In biology courses, students look at physiological changes during puberty, sexual organs, menstruation, fertilization and pregnancy, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. The intention of these subjects seems to be mainly to promote responsibility in the exercise of sexuality.

But besides the formal contents of educational programmes, teachers' approaches to the topic are very variable. In fact, teachers' handbooks actually recommend the discussion of certain issues that are not included in

textbooks like, in 6th grade, to inform about the role of sperm in the determination of sex and the need of an erection for an ejaculation to occur. But the ways in which teachers provide such information to students depend on their own conceptions about sexuality, which are often conservative and/or religious. This is why the Ministry of Education recognized the need for educating public teachers in order for them to convey a respectful view of sexuality.

In any case, sex education in public schools looks almost exclusively at reproductive physiological aspects, in accordance to the laicism of the Mexican State. This approach is considered neutral in terms of not conveying any particular values regarding sexuality, except for the idea of risk, health and responsibility. But this supposed absence of any moral judgment about sexuality is precisely a way to conceive it: as a biological asset of the human being that needs to be studied scientifically in order to inform the individual in his/her decision about his/her own sexual life.

ii) The Church

As said above, in Mexico the Catholic Church's discourse on sexuality had been the normative voice since the Colonial period, but its strength has been weakened by the secularization of social life. This does not mean that Catholic sexual morals have been substituted by individualism, tolerance and respect promoted by the cultural aspect of modernity. Rather, these points of view coexist at the macrosocial, community and subjective levels.

It would be a mistake to consider the Church's discourse as monolithic, for there are contradictions, struggles and negotiations between different groups within this institution. However, it is the official arguments of the Catholic hierarchy that have become

dominant among believers, who ignore the diverse levels of authority that are granted, for instance, to the Pope, to a Concilium, to a Pastoral letter or to a priest. These differences are ignored by the common faithful because it is convenient for the Church that any statement from a minister to be taken as God's word (Mejía 1996). Also in their quest for power, the Catholic hierarchy overlooks the importance that authorized religious writings give to conscience and free will, especially regarding sexuality and reproduction. So, since it is this group's view that dominates the Church's discourse on sexuality, I will describe briefly some of its postulates.

First of all, the Church's precepts of sexuality support certain social constructions that have come to be considered as 'natural' in Western thought. The naturalness of sexuality comes from the close association of sexuality to reproduction, because any prevention of pregnancy or any sexual pleasure, passion or joy that is not intended for procreation is considered sinful and a contradiction to God's mandate. This is part of Catholicism's disdain for the body, because it is considered an impediment for the perfection of the spirit, and only procreation redeems it from the sin of sexual enjoyment.

Inherited from the Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions, this conception of the body as dirty coincides with the image of women as inferior to men, because they were considered the source of sexual pleasure and, consequently, of doom. This hostility towards women was later embodied in the celibacy of priests and the prohibition of the priesthood to women (Mejía 1996).

According to Flandrin (1987), the first theologians, following St. Paul's teachings, considered marriage as a remedy against lewdness. In fact, marriage was an acceptable solution -albeit not ideal- for those common

people that could not attain the perfection of permanent chastity and it was accepted only in favour of reproduction. This is the origin of the idea of conjugal debt, by which both husband and wife could demand from the other the sexual act, to prevent further sinful acts.

By the nineteenth century, members of the Church were discussing whether or not all intercourse between a married couple was a sin because it was thought that, if pleasure was felt, the act was sinful, even though the intention was to procreate (Mejía 1996).

Recently, the Pontifical Council for the Family (1996) has produced a document with guidelines for sex education for parents in which the fundamental precepts of 'Christian mores' are stated:

...the indissoluble character of marriage and the relationship between love and procreation, as well as the immorality of premarital sex, abortion, contraception and masturbation... the beauty of motherhood and the wonderful reality of procreation, as well as the deep meaning of virginity (Pontifical Council for the Family 1996:92 and 102).

Despite the conservative and restrictive character of this code, a certain progressiveness could be granted to this document because, even though it still considers homosexuals as 'sexually immature' and 'abnormal', it calls for respect for 'these persons' and rejects any unfair discrimination against them (Mejía 1996).

In contrast to this orthodox position, some groups within the Church have fought for the recognition of sexuality as a positive aspect of humanity in which love, growth and well-being are expressed, albeit only within the boundaries of marriage. For example, the II Vatican Concilium, presided by the progressive Pope John XXIII, declared the intrinsic good of sexuality, because the principle of chastity, so literally taken in other times, referred to the 'adequate exercise of sexuality', which is for the subject's conscience to consider. By 1972 the Mexican bishopric had stated a similar position:

...it is a matter for husband and wife to decide, before God, the number of children that will form

their family. Not out of whim or for selfish reasons, but making a right judgment of their way of acting, adjusting it to divine law... (Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano 1972:8*).

All these moral prescriptions that have dominated the social construction of sexuality in the Western world and its Colonies do not automatically become codes of behavior for the members of all social groups. Firstly, variations brought about by the priests themselves make it impossible to consider such discourse a total imposition. Secondly, the degree of authority granted to the Church in matters considered private, like sexuality and reproduction, is variable among social groups¹³. Many forms of resistance, transformation and justification are carried out in disobedience -if considered such-. Some of these resistance strategies will be illustrated in subsequent chapters in which I will analyze how participants of this research relate to these normativities¹⁴.

iii) The Government: health and population policies.

Sexuality has been particularly absent from the Government's discourse until recently, because its emphasis has been mainly on reproduction as it pertains to the administration of population and, although the sexual is a precondition for procreation, it has not been addressed as an important issue for health or legal policies.

During the 1930's and 1940's, Mexico's project of development was closely related to population growth, in accordance with a Keynesian view of population as a producer and consumer of wealth. Consequently, in 1947 the sanitary code forbade explicitly the production,

¹³ See above, 3. **Secularization in Mexico**, in this same chapter.

¹⁴ See below, chapters IV: **The construction of gendered subjects of sexuality and the role of sexual knowledge**, and V: **The moral dimension of sexuality: evil, the sacred and rituals of sexual initiation**.

importation, spread and commercialization of any product that prevented conception or interrupted pregnancy, and it maintained strict penalties for abortion. However, rapid population growth stressed the Government with increasing demands for jobs, education, housing and health services, which it was not capable to provide at the same rate.

By 1970 the need for population control was enunciated by important groups of economists that established a relationship between population and development. To the imperative of economic planning, they added demographic and family planning. That is, they introduced and reinforced the idea of the rationality of reproductive processes.

On top of these ideas, doctors added information about the risks of repeated and frequent pregnancies for women, and intellectuals indicated that there was a demand for contraceptive services among both rural and urban women. This group, however, refused to reduce the problem of economic development to population growth control.

From 1950 to 1970 this process of social change brought about the abolition of the previous sanitary code and by 1974 there was an amendment to the Constitution that declared the principle of equality between men and women, and the right of each person and couple to regulate their own fertility. Health and population policies followed shortly (in 1977) and the Ministry of Health implemented the first Government Program for Integral Family Planning. This programme intended to provide contraceptive services to the general population through health institutions.

Thus began a process of the medicalization of reproduction whose fulfillment of goals relied mainly - and still does today- on the prescription of modern contraceptives (sterilization, IUD and oral contraceptives) immediately after delivery in public

health services¹⁵. The amazing success of such policy¹⁶ has been based on the spread of contraceptive practices mainly among married urban women in reproductive age, because Government programmes have not taken into consideration -nor acknowledged- the sexual practices of young and single people, nor have they reached rural areas sufficiently.

During all this time, sexuality itself did not appear as an issue for the Government, even though it was a precondition of reproduction. Neither was it considered a matter of health, nor of rights, partly because of the opposition of powerful right-wing groups like conservative businessmen allied to the Church, who could withdraw their support from other areas of policy that were considered fundamental, such as investment in the economic development of the country. It is interesting to note that, in spite of the commitment of the Mexican State to be secular, Catholic ideas regarding sexuality and reproduction have dominated its policies. This was not only a strategy in order to hold good relations with the Church but; actually, many groups within the Government shared these ideas.

It has been only in the last few years that the Government has started to look at sexuality and to include it in its preoccupations, again, as a consequence of its population and health policies. For instance, research on sexual behavior has been supported recently in order to try to understand and solve a demographic problem: the persistence of early procreation and the risks of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality that are related to repeated pregnancy, brief periods between

¹⁵ In Mexico, Government interest for decreasing population growth has led to some excesses, like sterilizing women without providing them with enough information and counseling, pushing them psychologically, or without letting them know at all (Lamas 1996a:20*)

¹⁶ Within the first five years of the programme the goals were reached and the global fertility rate declined from 5.5 children per woman in 1976 to 4.4 in 1981 (Welte 1991).

pregnancies and early or late parity. Some of these studies suggest that such cultural patterns of early procreation are related to meanings of gender and sexuality that make the use of contraceptives difficult, especially among young people from rural areas and among non-married women (Liguori and Szasz 1996).

Government programmes and policies have not made much mention of sexuality until recently, because of different factors. Firstly, the recognition of the urgent need to lessen the impact of the AIDS epidemic. Secondly, political reasons linked to recent discussions about reproductive health have pushed Mexican authorities to include sexuality in their discourse. This has occurred as a result of the strong criticism that diverse social actors and international movements have made of the overly controlling policies that do not pay attention to the needs and rights of individuals and only direct their efforts toward the control of their reproductive capacities (Lamas 1996a). In this context, the participation of the Mexican Government in both the International Conferences of Cairo in 1994 and Beijing in 1995 was crucial in terms of its commitment to implement reproductive health programmes that would address the issue of sexuality as part of this effort. As Petchesky (1996) recalls, in the final version of the Beijing Platform:

[The term] 'reproductive rights' -'the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so'- is now indelibly codified, through both Cairo and Beijing, in human rights law (Petchesky 1996:6).

Following this commitment to international law, in 1996 the Mexican Government published the '**Programa Nacional de Población**' (Poder Ejecutivo Federal 1996a), the '**Programa de Salud Reproductiva y Planificación Familiar**' (Poder Ejecutivo Federal 1996b) and the '**Programa Nacional de la Mujer 1995-2000**' (Poder Ejecutivo Federal 1996c). These programmes are part of

the **Plan Nacional de Desarrollo** that each Government designs for its period in office.

Although there is progress in the fact that terms like 'gender perspective' and 'reproductive health' are mentioned in these official documents, they are mainly taken as discursive tokens that superficially incorporate the concerns of vast sectors of the population and of various social movements, like women's groups. However, in general terms, there is an absence of a conceptualization of sexuality as separate from reproduction. When mentioned, a definition of sexuality as heterosexuality underlies the texts, and sexual practices are only explicitly referred to in connection with couples that are together with the intention to reproduce. Ultimately, the main concerns remain a decrease in the number of, and intervals between, children, and the delay of first pregnancy. Thus, there is a traditional and exclusive notion of family within these Government's plans, which disregards and neglects the needs of individuals that do not conform to such a norm. For instance in the **Programa de Salud Reproductiva y Planificación Familiar** (Poder Ejecutivo Federal 1996b), sexuality is only discussed when it comes to young people and 'gender perspective', but it is talked about in terms of heterosexuality and as a result of a preoccupation to avoid early and repeated pregnancies. The sexual practices and concerns of other individuals like single people and same-sex couples are not seen as relevant.

Also, sexual practice is mainly conceived in terms of the risk of unwanted pregnancy (never of unwanted intercourse) and sexually transmitted diseases, so the idea that sexuality is a potential health resource or a positive asset of the human being is not present at all. This association of sexual practice to disease is not exclusive to Mexican culture, but it is part of the broader contemporary Western conceptualization of sex as risk that has been present during the last 200 years.

The history of such association is linked, according to Weeks (1993), to the process by which sexuality has been made a 'fertile soil for moral panic' (Weeks 1993:83*). Although presently AIDS is the depository of many other social anxieties, in other times it was children's sexuality, prostitution, pornography and venereal diseases that conveyed the meaning of sex as danger. This discourse, however, is heir to the religious vision of the body as the source of sin:

More importantly, during the last hundred years the language that condemns it [sex] has changed: from the anathema of inherited morality, to the rhetoric of hygiene and medicine. The transition between both modalities -a long revolution in norms about sexuality- has never been easy, nor has it been finally realized (Weeks 1993:84*).

This idea of sex as risky permeates Government policies and programmes and, although official documents have incorporated more positive concepts like 'reproductive rights' and 'sexual and reproductive health', they do not specify how and by whom such notions are to be defined and protected, nor do they talk about the cultural, social and structural enabling conditions for their exercise in Mexico. Thus, currently in the Mexican Government's discourse, sexuality is only mentioned in close relation to reproduction and to population policies. Although it is included in official programmes, it is not defined as a possibility for growth, pleasure and health, but as a 'risky' practice that needs to be monitored and controlled by modern methods of contraception. Furthermore, the Government does not assume its role as the guarantor and provider of the conditions for sexual health, but only as the administrator of population growth and distribution.

iv) Social actors: feminism and women's groups, gay and lesbian movements and right-wing groups.

Presently, there are other social forces that, with

different degrees of strength and authority, have become important producers of discourses of sexuality. Sexuality is now a contested field in which these often opposing political forces are competing to make their definitions dominant or, at least, to accomplish respect for diversity and self-determination. I will briefly discuss these groups' conceptions next.

- Women's and feminist groups

During most of this century the only social sectors that were committed to sex education and reproduction control were feminist groups and a few socialists. However, in the first decades of our century, feminists' concerns did not question the predominant idea that women's place was within the domestic sphere, and the incipient movement's demands for education and for the elimination of sexual double standards were mainly directed to improve women's role as mothers and spouses. Their radical discourses regarding abortion and birth control were gradually put aside by the revolutionary Government, which finally allied with the Catholic Church in terms of the public approach to sexuality and reproduction.

Claims for reproductive freedom were not important until the second half of this century, when several studies started to show that many women, especially in urban areas, wanted to have fewer children than they already had (Elu de Leñero 1970). These changes seemed to be closely linked to the difficulties women faced with their incorporation into the work force.

It was not until the 1970's that feminist groups demanded the Government's attention to the vast individual and social changes that were needed for women to enjoy their sexuality, to decide about their fertility and to improve their social status. Thus, the main claim of these groups was, in the early seventies, the 'right over one's own body', as an expression of the right to

exercise sexuality and to control reproduction, as well as the recognition of women as autonomous persons. However, ideas about sexuality considered it closely related to male domination, as it can be seen in the following excerpt from a feminist article of the time that questions:

...religious and **machista** norms that forbid women to regulate their procreation and that impose on them an exhaustive use of their biology... sexuality strengthens domination relationships, instead of being an activity for true pleasure and communication (fem 1977:16*)

By the end of that same decade, there was an important innovation in feminist discourse around sexuality, brought about by the incorporation of the lesbian point of view to the movement. This trend allowed for a deeper questioning of sexual stereotypes, gender relations and male domination, which are the cornerstones of the idea of 'natural' heterosexuality, and gave impulse to the separation of sexuality from reproduction. However, the demand for free sexual options did not appear on the feminist agenda until the 1990's because it was considered strategically dangerous for the fragile social status that feminists had in previous years within the Mexican political scene.

In the present context of a favorable coincidence between the feminist movements and international organizations and foundations, which has forced Government to take a stance toward these subjects, Mexican feminists have turned to the concepts of sexual and reproductive health, first, and sexual and reproductive rights, later, in order to claim that reproduction cease to be the main issue of Government action, so as to include other issues like gender relations, sexually transmitted diseases, sex education and, if possible, abortion.

An essential aspect of the struggle for sexual and reproductive rights is the way in which citizenship is defined. In Mexico, this notion is not yet constructed as

an inalienable aspect of every individual, nor are there enabling conditions for full citizenship to be exercised. The construction of subjects of rights is far from being a reality and the political institutions that are supposed to protect and allow the exercise of citizenship rarely respond to their mandate. For Lamas (1996a) the problem lies in the relationship between the micro and macrosocial arenas of Mexican society:

Our 'entrance' to modernity, in terms of 'basic values and attitudes related to the promotion of social and individual freedom, to social progress, to the development of individual potentialities, and to a democratic vocation that leads to the defense of tolerance and diversity' will happen by making social and political identification processes meet with subjective individuation processes. In this hinge that articulates the social and the psychic, sexual and reproductive rights converge and, thus, become relevant in concrete life, that is, in the bodies of female and male citizens (Lamas 1996a:22*).

The ideas and discourses discussed in this section have recently started to influence Mexican women's lives through indirect means, like media, Government discourses and policies, and non-government organizations' work. Fighting against strong resistance from the dominant culture of gender, notions of women's rights and autonomy introduced by the feminist movement have started to permeate the Mexican sphere of politics.

- Gay and lesbian movements

Another important movement in Mexico in the discussions concerning the definition of sexuality has been the Gay movement. Until recently, homosexuality was mainly silenced, ridiculed or unacknowledged by vast sectors of Mexican society. By the time of the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic, homophobia was so general and ingrained in culture that it needed no explanation. However, although initially this prejudice was reinforced by the conservative discourses of AIDS as a 'divine

punishment'¹⁷, rejection of homosexuality has softened relatively during the last decade.

Of recent birth in Mexico¹⁸, the Gay movement was initially welcomed by leftist groups and became highly relevant in Mexican politics because of its fast and wide reaching response to the AIDS epidemic. This disease has made visible the hidden practice of same-sex behavior by propelling a large number of studies of sexual behavior and risky practices. Same-sex practices among men has been widely documented (Liguori 1995, Izazola, Valdespino and Sepúlveda 1988), as well as the fact that such practices are not always considered an emblem of homosexual identity among Mexican men. In fact, same-sex practices, especially penetrative insertive behavior in anal sex, do not seem to bring into question the heterosexual and **macho** identity of many men (Carrier 1995, Lumslen 1991). These differences, brought to light both by the Gay movement for AIDS prevention and by the studies done in order to stop its spread, have had to be discussed by Mexican society in very different fora, but their existence has had to be acknowledged.

Still, these groups are largely comprised of educated middle-class men and women that are in contact with Western sexual identities' notions and movements, and do not seem to have influenced considerably the life of those many people that have sex with partners of the same sex.

- Right-wing groups.

In confrontation with all the above groups that struggle to open up discussion about sexual health, right-wing movements have always been very active, but the AIDS epidemic has made them double their efforts.

¹⁷ This idea was declared in 1985 by Girolamo Prigione, papal nuncio in Mexico (Monsiváis 1995).

¹⁸ The first Gay demonstration took place in Mexico City in 1978.

These groups have grown in organization and numbers, although their importance in the political scene would not be so great if they did not have the support of the Catholic hierarchy and of several political and private sectors. Moreover, in the past few years, the right-wing **Partido Acción Nacional**, which is close to these organizations although it does not always formally acknowledge it, has won more elections than ever before, thus changing its nature from a pressure group into a governing entity.

The following episode is an illustration of their ideas regarding sexuality. Guadalajara is now ruled by authorities from the **Partido Acción Nacional**, some of whom, in 1995, tried to forbid the use of miniskirts and 'unworthy clothes' in a particular office. But protests from a great number of organizations and individuals stopped the implementation of this rule. A few months later, in this same city, police agents invaded the offices of **Ser Humano**, an institution devoted to the fight against AIDS, with the intention of 'making a raid because homosexuals were going to gather for a course of protected sex, in which they surely would carry out orgies' (González Ruiz 1996:19*).

At the end of the 1980's, the '**Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia**' (which was responsible for the withdrawal of sex education in public schools in the 1930's) led a series of demonstrations against the '**Consejo Nacional para la Prevención y Control del SIDA**' (CONASIDA) because of its AIDS prevention campaigns in which condom use was recommended. Another group called '**Comité Nacional Provida**' (Pro-life) was founded in 1978 with the purpose of fighting a proposal to de-criminalise abortion, and it has been against all AIDS campaigns ever since. Regarding HIV-infection, for instance, both organizations recommend fidelity in the case of married couples and abstinence for young people as the only measure of prevention. Regarding modern contraceptive

methods, 'Provida' has published a series of pamphlets saying that they 'seriously damage your health and deteriorate your marriage', that they 'disintegrate' the sexuality of those that use them, that they are 'against nature' and promote 'immorality' and that they favour women being taken as objects of sexual pleasure (González Ruiz 1996:22*).

Sometimes, and for strategic purposes, the discourse of conservative groups avoids discussion of problematic topics like sex education, the use of contraception or AIDS prevention, so that they concentrate on more controversial issues like abortion, pornography and prostitution. Old prejudices regarding virginity, adultery and masturbation are used in order to criticize sex education, family planning or AIDS prevention. For instance, against all evidence, conservative groups assert that condoms are not a safe method of contraception and AIDS prevention, and that contraceptives have both physical and psychological damaging side effects.

The penetration of the discourses of all these social actors varies widely, but it is a fact that sexuality is now a contested field in which individuals have to come to terms with different and even opposed discourses that intend to prevail.

v) The Media

In accordance with the hybridity of Mexican culture, the media -especially television- disseminate contrasting discourses of sexuality like the ones described above. However, this does not mean that all messages are given the same opportunities nor that media are constructing a democratic plurality in which different options are shown for individuals to adhere to or criticize¹⁹. Rather, they

¹⁹ Even though certain sex education messages from Government agencies and non-governmental organizations have been denied access to media, recently the Mexican Government granted permission to the Catholic hierarchy to spread sex

try to convey to a very heterogeneous public certain standards and stereotypes that do not take into account such diversity, but that portray the values and morals that dominant groups are trying to impose in order to favour the capitalist expansion of the economy and the market. That is, consumption and political stability for the ruling classes are the main goals that the Mexican media are pursuing.

The great numbers of populations that electronic media reach all around the country, along with their entertaining images and their capacity to adapt to new and changing situations, have granted them a prominent place in the formation of cultural patterns. This does not mean that the messages television sends are taken up immediately and without question by the people, but that they have become a fundamental source of discourses about sexuality.

The media are seen by some as:

...a positive element for the integration and cohesion of the society, for the promotion of modern lifestyles and for the transformation of certain aspects of reality as desired, by spreading information, quickly and repeatedly, to wide and diverse population sectors, by stimulating the formation of a homogeneous public opinion and by allowing certain topics to enter the agenda of collective discussion (Camarena 1996:16*)

In this sense, the media can be a powerful and efficient means to foster consciousness, generate discussion and promote belief and behavior changes regarding health, reproduction and sexuality (Tuirán 1996). For example, the media have been used by the Mexican Government in order to persuade public opinion about the need for the adoption of preventive health programmes, and the convenience of family planning, as well as to inform about the services it offers. This goal has not always been reached through explicit messages sponsored by Government agencies, but also within other

education messages (Medina 1996).

kinds of programmes like soap operas and entertainment shows. However, as mentioned in the last section, Government AIDS campaigns have always faced strong criticism and resistance by conservative groups and thus they have had to avoid any explicit references to anatomy, sexual intercourse or even the use of condoms.

According to Lamas (1996a), Mexican feminists found a powerful ally in the changes brought about by audiovisual culture. Messages from American movies and television programmes have gradually eroded traditional prohibitions by portraying sexually active and desiring women without calling them 'whores', thus questioning the religious classification of women either as 'holy' or 'impure' according to their sexual behavior. Entitlement to women's sexual practice and pleasure has questioned marriage and self-sacrificing motherhood as women's fate, by making sexuality a symbol of a valid personal search for satisfaction. But, whenever trying to make this aspiration real in the Mexican context, both women and men, especially the young, find innumerable obstacles against their desire for liberation.

Also, even though some messages promote sexual freedom, they often do so by portraying early and irresponsible practice (Ginsburg and Rapp 1991). Alternatively, sexual images may be used in order to sell almost any product (Corona 1994).

Others argue that the capacity of the media to spread models represents a danger in terms of social control because, the media act in favour of the **status quo** or of changes that frequently imply transculturation and loss of local customs and traditions. For instance, the images of women and men that Mexican programmes frequently convey, praise the domestic role of women, as well as their self-sacrifice and suffering, or they idealize romantic love, in which women play the role of the sexual objects of male desire.

What is undeniable, however, is the influence of the

media on the diverse cultural constructions of sexuality and gender that coexist in Mexico. The importance of this situation lies in the possibilities it offers for individuals to criticize and reflect upon the historical and relative character of discourses, through the plurality of positions and messages that the media convey.

This coexistence of different views of the world and meanings about sexuality is part of the process of the secularization of Mexican society. Coming from a historical point of view, Rocha (1994) describes the forms and models of love and sexual practice that have been conveyed through the press and the radio from the 1930's to the 1960's in Mexico. It is only during the middle part of this century that discourses about sexuality came out of private spaces and of confessionals into public arenas represented, in this case, by consultations on the radio and on the printed media. In such consultations, middle class young women would call or write anonymously in order to ask for advice about love and sex from older, female consultants. For Rocha (1994):

...the problem page had the function of intermediation between a vast anonymous female population and the producers of a secular, moralist and consumptionist discourse in matters of love (Rocha:1994:3*).

Generally, the advice given by these pages and programmes followed the precepts of Catholicism strictly, although they were not acknowledged as such, nor linked to their religious origin. One example of this transition is the following excerpt from an advice:

If you are in love you have to shelter yourself in contemplation or, if anything, in love games which, among well educated persons, never go beyond a game, and you have to avoid the familiarity that modern customs are promoting, which is provoking the young man to see in the woman only an amusement, an incident or maybe a battle that he will win in time (in Rocha 1994:5*).

According to these messages, women are not supposed

to experience erotic pleasure, but they are expected to wait for the man to take the initiative. Even if they have the intention to seduce, they should never do it openly. Men, for their part, could have affairs as they pleased, because it was expected from them to have 'lived' and thus be better husbands, since marriage would be a 'haven from his agitated bachelorhood' (Rocha 1994:6*).

During the 1950's and 1960's more women started to join the formal labour force and media messages started to insist on the importance and the need of combining work and family duties. But even though messages were still conservative, women started to strive for an independent life, which was rarely possible. By then, advertising promised success both in work and in love through the consumption of every 'good' that could transform girls into seductive women (e.g., make-up, perfume, deodorant, cosmetics, etc).

The Catholic Church responded by launching the 'campaign of moral customs' (Rocha 1994) in which it criticized women's fashion (like miniskirts and trousers) and 'obscene' images in theatres, television and magazines. These ideas were echoed by the problem pages in magazines as shown by the following comment:

The ultramodern woman, who talks about everything, who goes out and comes in, who laughs and is noisy... she wins the man by using means that are not in accordance to discretion, to shame (in Rocha 1994:9*).

However, by analyzing the kinds of questions readers and listeners asked, Rocha (1994) asserts that these norms were hardly followed, and that sexual behaviors differed radically from the morals that people were expected to comply with. Rather, young people expressed an aspiration of deciding over their own bodies and their desires.

Gradually, by the beginning of the 1970's discourse about love and sexuality in these publications was taken

over by professionals trained in psychoanalytic and sexological approaches to sexuality, making the consultations more open to sexual pleasure. In this kind of media, popular science coexisted with traditional common sense as the source of truth about sexuality.

Rather than following moral criteria and advising repeatedly about women's discretion concerning sex, many of these magazines nowadays acknowledge female desire regardless of couple status. However, many of them use scientific terms like 'normal', in order to qualify the sexual restlessness expressed by their readers, reinforcing certain traits that are supposedly 'feminine' -like the 'natural' wish for marriage and motherhood-, and making the traditional stereotype of woman coexist with more open constructions of female sexuality.

So far, I have reviewed the main discourses that struggle to define sexuality within Mexican contemporary culture. Overall, their weight and relative power remains to be discussed. Undoubtedly, the moral constructions promulgated by the Church still have a definite influence both on the experience of individuals regarding sexuality and on political decisions made by the Government about health issues and legal dispositions like, for instance, maintaining abortion as a crime. The Church's channels are very diverse, from right-wing groups that lobby the Government and influence its policies through diverse forms of pressure, to local priests in rural areas, to common people that inherit and reproduce Catholic moral prescriptions.

Religious discourse regarding sexuality is still the model against which other discourses compete or collaborate with because, after prehispanic conceptions were absorbed by Catholicism during the Colonial period, this is the most ancient and powerful discourse, rooted through centuries not only in external institutions and agents, but in the subjectivity of individuals.

In fact, progressive sectors of the Government have

had to struggle with the Church and its allies in order to establish plans and programmes that subtly take into account sexuality. This has been true for AIDS prevention campaigns and even family planning. The felt need of the population to decide over their reproduction, especially amidst adverse economic and social circumstances, might have been one of the reasons for the success of such campaigns, mainly in urban areas.

The presence of the Church across Mexico is still greater than that of Government's health agencies, although the population is gradually hearing their discourses. However, progressive concepts included in health programmes are not merely substituting Catholic morals, but coexisting with them. For example, rural couples are starting to plan their reproductive lives, but without reflecting on gender power, since it is often the man who makes such decisions, regardless of the woman's opinion. Strategically, many women are using contraception without asking for their husbands' consent and this is possible thanks to the increasing presence of Government health agencies.

Scientific discourse is also making a counterweight to religion regarding sexuality, through the inclusion of physiological information about fertility and conception in all elementary and secondary public schools, thus breaking the silence that surrounded the subject. However, concrete information about intercourse, contraception and AIDS is not given until higher courses, to which only a segment of the population has access. And, again, the contradiction between these discourses does not end with the substitution of one for another, but with a particular hybridity that sometimes produces a conflict of loyalties between the young people's own desires, their parents' traditions and the prestige of the modernity which they want to belong to.

The least listened voice might be the progressive movements' and civil groups', -like feminists, and

gay/lesbian movements- which have to conduct intensive lobbying with Government agents in order for their agenda to be discussed, since their popular base is still on the making and the fora they have are scarce and local. Although it is true that they have access to spaces in the media that reach educated social groups -especially in urban newspapers and journals-, their presence in television is still very much regulated, partly because the main networks in the country -**Televisa** and **Televisión Azteca**- are closely allied to the Government and do not really open their means to debates and criticisms of the **status quo**.

The discourse of electronic media might be the most widespread of all because of the far-reaching capacity built up during the last three decades. But it is a fact that they do not convey a homogeneous message regarding sexuality. For example, the kind of images that are portrayed in Mexican commercial television in popular broadcasts like soap operas, have opened the issue of sexuality and pleasure, but often reinforcing the traditional split of the female image into mother/whore, and conveying a negative moral message regarding sexual intercourse out of wedlock. Sexuality is mainly presented as an evil and risky practice, and rarely as an opportunity for growth and love. Homosexuality is often mocked at or depicted only in order to condemn it.

Other progressive messages concerning gender equality and the entitlement to individual choice make their way to electronic media in certain entertainment series and programmes, but with the handicap that many of them are imported from other countries -mainly the United States- as a result of the globalization of culture and the expansion of the market economy. But at the same time that these positive messages are broadcast by television, other images of sexuality concerning women as sexual objects are equally or even more so portrayed. Sex as merchandise, particularly from the point of view of men,

has become a product for mass consumption, whether in the cities or in rural areas.

The social relevance and importance of all these discourses is varied and unequal, according to the heterogeneity that I have discussed about Mexican culture. Different discourses are dominant in different settings, so that it is not possible to assert which of them prevails as a general rule for the whole country. What I did in this chapter was to construct a background in terms of the history of the social construction of sexuality in Mexico that will serve as a framework for the interpretation of participants' accounts. It is they who will express the dominance of these discourses, at least within their subjective realm.

SUBJECTIVITY, SEXUALITY AND EXPERIENCE

In the previous chapter¹ I have described and presented some of the most relevant processes of Mexican contemporary culture, as well as those social discourses that have constructed sexuality throughout history, and those that presently compete to define it. So, after describing historical and sociological issues that provide a context for the interpretation of participants' stories and constructions of meaning, in this chapter I will discuss this thesis' theoretical object by identifying some of the current debates within social sciences regarding gender, identity, sexuality and subjectivity, in order to state my position in relation to them.

I will explore the relationships between subjectivity and sexuality through the concept of experience as a gateway to understanding that complex intertwining of the individual, the cultural and the social. This task is central to the thesis because it will provide a conceptual framework for the main object of study: the dialogic construction of the meaning of sexuality within a particular historical and social context that offers individuals certain possibilities for the interpretation of their desires, feelings and practices, as well as for the construction of their identities.

This chapter will address theoretical concepts relevant to my approach through analyzing the relationship between sexuality, subjectivity and power as discussed by Foucault and criticized by a number of feminist scholars, especially in relation to certain problems of identity, sex and gender. Then I will continue discussing four major processes that intervene

¹ Chapter I: **The hybrid construction of sexuality in Mexico.**

in the construction of meaning of sexuality:

- social discourses and power
- local discourses and culture
- dialogue and meaning
- the subjective experience of the body

These four processes are not to be considered as contexts for subjectivity but, rather, as discourses, interpretation frameworks, voices and models that the subject faces and deals with in the process of ascribing meaning to his/her body, its pleasures, desires and activities. Each of these processes will be addressed from the point of view of experience, that is, as meaning negotiated and constructed by the individual within his/her culture. Ultimately, therefore, this chapter is about understanding, from the standpoint of experience, how social discourses, along with other sources of meaning like community voices, dialogues and the subjective experience of the body, are dealt with by the individual in the construction of the meaning of sexual practices.

Before discussing the concepts and theories that are relevant to the object of this research, it is important to indicate that, as a reflection of the power relationships embedded in the production of knowledge throughout the world, the local literature of Latin America and Mexico is very much informed by Western theories of subjectivity, sexuality or experience. Many regional theorists abstract concepts from Western dominant theories and use them without debating whether or not they are relevant to the social reality that they are applied to².

Most of the regional gender studies are guided by Western conceptualizations. Whether there is any local production of theory or if it is a matter of its

² One example of this is the case of psychoanalytic and psychological theories that were very popular during the 1950's to the 1980's in debates about the existence of a Mexican national identity (see for example, Béjar 1979, Aramoni 1965 and 1984, Fromm and Maccoby 1973, González Pineda 1961 and Ramírez 1983).

difficulty to access and circulate within the global academic milieu, the fact is that regionally born concepts or culturally specific critiques of Western theories are scarce. What Latin American theorists have mainly tried to do in the field of sexuality and gender is to debate with Western authors on their own terms, but the literature hardly offers any discussions about how relevant their concepts are for our cultures (see for example, Tuñón 1990, Baz 1996, Lamas 1996b, Lara 1992).

A few Latin American social theorists, especially from Brazil, take into account the historical character of the concept of sexuality and thus render it relative to culture. Parker (1991) does this quite carefully in his study of sexual culture in contemporary Brazil, by discussing how the modern concept of sexuality was introduced and appropriated in a very particular manner in order to describe a supposed Brazilian character. Parker also discusses the effects of such cultural process among different social groups. It is noteworthy, however, that Parker is an American sociologists.

Given this situation, I had to resort to those concepts already coined, mainly in the United States and Europe, with an awareness that there might not be a perfect match between them and my object of study. The partial relevance of these concepts for the social phenomenon I am looking at invites me to warn about the limited scope of my theoretical approach and to point out to the need for Latin American social scientists to historicize and contextualize theory, as well as to debate Western concepts and produce original concepts.

In this thesis I will construct a theoretical framework based on Western approaches and later discuss their degree of match with the meanings produced during the conversations, as to point out the possible relevance of certain concepts like sexuality, subjectivity, the separation between gender/sex systems, the construction of a sovereign and autonomous individuality and certain emblems of gender identity.

1. Sexuality and subjectivity

To discuss sexuality leads directly to an analysis of subjectivity, because both have come to be inextricably linked when speaking about individuality and identity, concepts that are central to modernity.

According to Stanton (1992), as a result of the recent proliferation of studies concerning sexuality, there has been a wide debate around the issue of subjectivity, because

...the historisation (and thus the denaturalization) of sexuality can be viewed as part and as parcel of the déconstruction of an essential subjectivity that has marked modernity, and more specifically, postmodernity (Stanton 1992:4).

This assertion emerges from the historical works of Foucault (1981, 1988b) among others, which discuss the ways in which sexuality has become one of the main elements that intervene in the construction of subjectivity -and identity- in modern societies.

During the last two centuries of Western history, through a complex process of production of knowledge and technologies of power, sexuality has come to be considered as the most spontaneous natural thing about us (Weeks 1986). Thus, our sex is supposed to define who we are, what we do, whom we desire and what kind of sexual practices we are to carry out, as if laid down by biological mandate. The strength of this construction is so great that sexuality is almost the only certainty left for the modern individual, who clings to it as if it were the last trace of an unshaken, essential identity. It has been history, especially from a social constructionist point of view, which has taken on the task to trace how sexuality has become the main emblem of identity for modern subjectivity, and therefore to question the biological determination of sexual identity and desire. (Weeks 1992a, 1993)

Throughout a long historical process of power

struggles, sexuality in the Western world was finally granted a dominant place in the description of individual identity, specially thanks to the deployment of scientific discourses like medicine, psychology and sexology, during the previous and the present centuries. In his historical study about the construction of the sexed body by anatomy and medicine, Laqueur (1990) says that:

Sexuality as a singular and all-important attribute with a specific object -the **opposite** sex- is the product of the late eighteenth century. There is nothing natural about it (Laqueur 1990:13).

This was no trivial development, since due to the delimitation and description of sexuality, new surfaces for the exercise of power -or 'biopower', according to Foucault- were useful in order to administer and control both populations and individuals in more efficient ways. As Weeks (1992a) indicates:

For sex is the pivot along which the whole technology of life developed: sex was a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species; that is, it offered a way of regulating both individual bodies and the behaviour of the population (the body politic) as a whole (Weeks 1992a:230).

There is a close link between sexuality and power in Foucault's work, which is expressed particularly in relation to the concept of subjectivity. Foucault's ideas on the modern subject have analyzed the constitutive role that the 'invention' of sexuality has had. In this sense, to study subjectivity means to look at the ways in which men and women turn themselves into subjects, particularly the way they come to consider themselves as subjects of sexuality. Foucault's quest for understanding how the modern individual has made an experience of himself as the subject of 'a sexuality' (Foucault 1988b:9*), was preceded by an analysis of the ways in which, throughout the centuries, Western man (and woman, I should add) has been taken to consider him/herself as a subject of desire.

Granted that sexuality has become constitutive of modern subjectivity and that it is conceptualized as a power relationship, the individual is thus constituted by power, which shapes his/her thoughts and desires, and limits his/her possibilities of action.

... the important issue is to know in what ways, through which channels, along which discourses does power slide into the faintest and most individual of behaviours, which channels allow it to reach infrequent or hardly perceptible forms of desire, how it infiltrates and controls every day pleasure - all that along with effects that could be of rejection, blockade, disqualification, but also of incitement, intensification, in brief, the 'polymorphous techniques of power' (Foucault 1981:19*)

In this quote, the concept of power is not reduced to a negative, forbidding imposition but, rather, it is conceived as positive in character: it constitutes, incites, delineates and names. The exercise of power in modern societies is not only -and not mainly- supported on juridical power, based on law and punishment, but upon other strategies and techniques like normalization and control, that go beyond the structure of the State and permeate social relations.

This argument is elaborated in **The History of Sexuality** (Foucault 1981), in which Foucault discusses what he calls 'the repressive hypothesis', which to him was the main way of looking at sexuality in Western societies during the previous century. This hypothesis assumes that sex has been repressed, denied and silenced because of the supposed need to produce and preserve culture, which would always be threatened by our animal essence. This construction implies that sexuality is an innate asset of our human nature, which needs to be expressed and satisfied just as any other biological drive.

But Foucault criticizes such a hypothesis because, during that time, sexuality was in fact created, talked about, invited to become a thing-in-itself, even if as a secret known to exist. Sexuality became a useful tool of

control through the production of knowledge around it, which allowed for new ways to exercise power. Normalization and pathology, taken as health issues and therefore as a concern for public administration, were not any more exclusive matters for morals and religion and came to be the main leverages for the classification of individuals according to their sexual practices. The construction of sexuality imposed an array of 'techniques of self'³ that drove the individual into self-policing in order to adapt him/herself to the definitions of normality. One of these definitions was heterosexuality, and the unequivocal relation of sex to gender, in which the body determined identity.

Through his historical analyses, Foucault intended:

...to analyze the practices through which individuals were driven to pay attention to themselves, to discover themselves and to declare themselves as subjects of desire, putting at play a certain relation that would allow them to discover in desire the truth about their being, be it natural or fallen (Foucault 1988b:9*).

If considered in detail, this process describes the construction not just of subjectivity itself, but of a particular subjectivity that is the product of modern societies and power techniques, in which science has played a key role by defining normativities about what is and what is not natural or normal, in short, by defining the 'truth'. The concept of the dyad knowledge-power, whose terms implicate each other in an inevitable relationship, is central to sexuality for the modern subject:

There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth that operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth (Foucault 1980:93).

³ ...those techniques that allow individuals to carry out a number of operations upon their own bodies, their souls, their thoughts, their behaviours, in such a way as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power, etc., etc. (Foucault in Morey 1991:35*)

Foucault traces the various discourses that have constructed sexuality since the eighteenth century in Europe, pointing to the strategies that helped this concept become dominant in the definition of the modern individual⁴.

Other historical works (Ariès, Béjin, Foucault, et al 1987) have stressed the importance of religion and of the Church as the chief institution that held what were the dominant ideas regarding sexuality until the eighteenth century. In Catholicism, the quest for chastity and surveillance of oneself regarding the pleasures of the flesh was a necessary path toward salvation and, among other techniques, confession helped to make self-policing a powerful tool for the control and punishment of the body.

From the eighteenth century on, with the gradual arrival of modernity, a sort of displacement of discourses of truth took place, in which medical science took over as the main social discourse that defined sexuality and that, in fact, created it as a 'natural' thing. However, this discursive shift does not mean that previous dominant discourses were totally discarded because, although in modern societies this process of secularization of sexuality has been taking place for a couple of centuries, the relationship between sexuality and religiosity still exists⁵. It remains to be seen if the same process has happened in Mexican society, because it seems that there are layers of social discourses of sexuality that coexist as remaining of other epochs' with today's discourses, with different degrees of

⁴ We have to mention the four images that Foucault identified as aids to the construction of sexuality:

- the hysterization of woman's body
- the psychiatrization of perverse pleasure/the homosexual as abnormal
- the pedagogization of children's sex
- the socialization of procreative behaviour (Foucault 1981:127*)

⁵ For illustration with participants' accounts see chapter V: **The moral dimension of sexuality: evil, the sacred and rituals of sexual initiation.**

predominance among social and cultural groups⁶.

Given its historical nature, subjectivity is itself changing not only in time but also across cultures. For Foucault the term 'subject' has two meanings. On the one hand, it means:

...subjected to other through control and dependency, and [on the other hand] subject [as] tied to his own identity through consciousness or knowledge of himself. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjects and requires submission (Foucault 1988a:231*).

This quote introduces a key concept for the analysis of sexuality: the concept of identity, which is conceived by Foucault not as essential to the individual, but as constructed on the basis of discourses and techniques of power specific to a historical period, or society and even to a certain class. Such a way of defining identity contradicts modern ideas about the individual, because identity is regarded as a volatile and unstable relationship of power that defines the self, and not as an innate quality of the individual. Identity is therefore one of the elements that constitute subjectivity, and it is in turn one of the processes through which individuals are subjected. Thus, this concept becomes central for the theoretical analysis of subjectivity and sexuality that I intend to offer in this thesis.

2. Sex, identity and gender.

The idea of an essence of individuality and identity emerged during the Enlightenment in Europe and, with its particular variations and vicissitudes, was brought to the New World through colonialism. It cannot be said that these notions were simply implanted in Mexico, because they were resisted and transformed by a strong sense of community and ethnic identity that native Peoples had⁷,

⁶ See previous chapter: **The hybrid construction of sexuality in Mexico.**

⁷ See chapter I, 4.2. **The Colonial period.**

and that still underlie much of Mexico's contemporary culture, especially in rural and indigenous areas, and among migrant-lower social groups in the cities. It might be true that a sense of individual choice has been instilled among middle and privileged urban classes, but the conception that the individual is linked to his social group and to nature is still valid among present Indian populations. It is important, nevertheless, to review and discuss the prevalent Western conceptualizations, because they permeate the main contemporary discourses of sexuality in Mexico - especially those promulgated by the State- which rely on the existence of a sovereign individual to decide upon his/her sexuality, health and reproduction.

So, going back to the Western concept of individual, Hall (1992) describes its main characteristics as:

The Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centered, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action, whose 'centre' consisted of an inner core which emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same -continuous or 'identical' with itself- throughout the individual's existence. The essential centre of the self was the person's identity (Hall 1992:275).

One of the supposed essences of individual identity is, in this context, sex, because it imposes a fictional sense of coherence and unity on an otherwise random or unrelated set of biological functions, sensations and pleasures (Weeks 1986). Thus, the question of identity is that of what kinds of meanings are ascribed to bodies and their activities; of a process of cultural construction of the biological within the parameters and norms of a certain cultural and historical period. As Foucault said, power has been inserted within the body, and it is exposed by the body itself (Foucault 1979).

The historical equivalence between sex and gender identity, between having a male or a female body and being a man or a woman, has stood as natural for

centuries, tying the individuals to definitions posed by dominant institutions and discourses about femininity and masculinity. Needless to say, gender has had a definite role in this historical process, because it has guided dominant ideas about bodies, sexual practice, reproduction and identity.

A close analysis of such process is offered by Laqueur (1990) who traces the way in which European medical descriptions of male and female bodies and sexes have been fundamentally guided by gender, therefore constituting sexual difference -rather than discovering it-, and ascribing hierarchical meaning between these two categories.

However, both the unequivocal relationship between sex and gender identity, and the unified character of the subject have been called into question by different schools of Western social science and social movements. On the one hand, during this century there have been major 'de-centerings' of the project of individualism in social theory, which Hall (1992) considers were caused by a) marxism, b) psychoanalysis, c) linguistics, d) Foucault's work and e) feminism. In their own specific areas of knowledge, each of these theoretical frameworks have placed the subject within a web of social, political and psychological relations, structures and institutions, stripping him/her from the sovereignty granted by the once overwhelming power of Reason.

Firstly, marxism denied individuals any real agency in the course of history because of their embeddedness in social and economic structures of production, which determined the conditions in which they were to live. Such conditions were not constructed by individuals but inherited from previous generations, limiting largely their choice and autonomy. Marx also questioned the idea of an essential humanity so defended by humanist philosophy, because he made social relations -and not the individual subject- the centre of his theoretical endeavor.

A second major de-centering of the notion of the sovereign individual was produced by psychoanalytic theory, because it regarded identity as learned through an interactive process and, consequently, not an essential asset. Freud also shook the Enlightenment project by conferring to the unconscious a great strength and influence in the life of the individual, thus deeply questioning the power of reason and consciousness as the centre of subjectivity.

Regarding sexuality, Freud's theory of the sexual drive as undifferentiated and lacking a fixed object, questioned the naturalness of heterosexuality because he considered that it was only through socialization that this untidy impulse was tamed by the work of culture. Sexuality as 'perverse and polymorphous', as it was originally defined by Freud, shook the time's certainty of biology as destiny, introducing the possibility of the sexual as diverse and of identity as the product of a process of development. Drawing from early sexology, heterosexuality was considered, from then on, a triumph of civilization, which succeeded in channeling original bisexual impulses into culturally accepted forms of expression of desire and sexual activity, mainly into coitus and reproductive practice, as well as into dominant definitions of masculinity and femininity.

Thirdly, linguistics also displaced the centre of the subject because it has shown that, as Hall (1992) recalls:

...language is a social, not an individual system. It pre-exists us. We cannot in any sense be simply its authors. To speak a language is not only to express our innermost, original thoughts, it is also to activate the vast range of meanings which are already embedded in our language and cultural systems (Hall 1992:288).

We can only produce meanings by positioning ourselves within the rules of language. Furthermore, linguistics also proved that meanings are not fixed to the objects outside language, but that they emerge from relations of similarity and difference with other words

in with the system. More recently, the de-centering produced by linguistics has been deepened by schools of discourse analysis and sociolinguistics that study language as it is used (speech), and not as an abstract system subjected to universal rules. This shift has introduced subjectivity into the issue, by considering the social and historical embeddedness of language, against the notion of a stable formal structure. Another impact on the certainty of the Enlightenment subject has been Foucault's work, because it questioned individual agency by showing how the modern subject is a historical construction of the nineteenth century, brought about by the deployment of disciplinary power, with its host of new strategies of subjection and control. With the concept of 'biopower', Foucault showed that the subject had not an essential human nature, but was constituted precisely by different techniques of power that constrained the individual into policing him/herself and offering further surfaces for the exercise of even subtler subjections. The invention of sexuality was a key element for this process.

Finally, feminism has also questioned the modern notion of identity as a fixed and essential state through exposing how we are formed and produced as gendered subjects, challenging the notion that men and women are part of the same identity (Mankind) and replacing it with the study of the process of construction of sexual difference and its effects. Therefore, feminism both as theory and as social movement has made explicit the process of construction of meaning of sex in modern societies, a process that is not alien to power. With the famous sentence that 'the personal is also political', feminism claimed attention to the political dimension of subjectivity, therefore granting identity a changing historical and social character.

The implications of these theoretical and social developments are wide and unmeasurable, but they have produced, at the least, a restlessness about the

certainty that modern societies and cultures once had in terms of the control and agency that the individual was supposed to have upon her/his life. Only the notion of the unconscious taking over our behaviour, feelings and thoughts, along with that of the constraint that social relations exert on individuals -as posed by marxism- produced an explosive effect both in academic circles and later, in the experience of individuals themselves as these knowledges were transformed into popular discourses. One of the major effects of these discourses was that identity ceased to be regarded as a fixed and stable essence of the individual, but as ever changing according to historical conditions. It remains to be seen how deep these transformations have carved non-Western cultures and societies, but it is my impression that not only have they not reached the general population, but that even the Enlightenment subject as a sovereign, stable and autonomous entity is not a prevailing experience for many social groups, at least in Mexico. However, these ideas are starting to be heard and incorporated within the media, the institutions of knowledge and the Government, so that they are being considered important concepts to divulge and to orientate political action.

One of the major de-centerings of the Enlightenment subject has been the historization of sexuality, and particularly heterosexuality, by regarding it as a social construction itself. These approaches to sexuality showed that heterosexuality was in fact projected against the background of what was considered the unnatural, namely same-sex and non-reproductive practices.

...it was the attempt to define 'homosexuality', the 'abnormal' form of sexuality, which forced a sharper definition of 'heterosexuality' as the norm... (Weeks 1992a:240).

Katz (1995) argues that heterosexuality was invented by sexology during the last years of the nineteenth century as part of the attempt of clinicians to produce a gnoseology of pathological sexual impulses and acts. In

such early works, all drives, practices and desires that were not related to reproduction were considered perverse and thus deviated from nature. This is why only the so-called 'natural' -reproductive- sex would be called 'sexual impulse', without any prefix at all. However, as Katz (1995) recalls, Krafft-Ebbing acknowledged that even men and women who engaged in coitus, frequently did not have procreation in mind and even intentionally avoided it. The search for pleasure allowed the recognition of such an ambiguous space, in which perversion would exist, even for individuals that were consistently oriented toward the different sex.

So, in the Western world, this kind of sexuality has been constructed as the 'natural' sexuality and has been equated to the identity of persons that have sexual inclinations for people of the different sex, regardless of their intentions to procreate. This definition did not lack political consequences, because heterosexuality has become the norm against which all other sexualities are compared.

This production of knowledge is part of the process of the medicalization of sexuality, in which classifications and categories have actually helped to constitute identities based on sexual practice and desire. According to Weeks (1991), the construction of sexual identities -like homosexuality and lesbianism- has a paradoxical nature because, even though they are based on the pathologisation of sexuality, their appropriation and redefinition by those who identify themselves that way has provided a basis for solidarity, for a sense of community and for political action as well. Thus, at the same time that identity ties the individual to a certain way of being, behaving, desiring and having social relations it also produces a sense of belonging that lessens the experience of marginality and rejection produced by the social dominance of a certain sexuality, namely heterosexuality.

Never until recently, however, and thanks partly to

feminism and to the sexual liberation movements, has heterosexuality been considered a product of history and, therefore, its meaning as 'normality' or 'nature' been directly questioned. This process, however, seems to be happening mainly in modern Western societies, and among certain social groups within them and it cannot be taken as a universal tendency. The issue of sexual identities, in terms of gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual, cannot be considered a generalized concern for all cultures. While in the US and Britain it may well be a fundamental part of struggles for dignity and rights, in developing countries like Mexico the notion of a sexual identity itself might be completely alien for much of its population. The consequences of such movements may not be as relevant to the general experience of sexuality in these countries because they have not impacted the political scenario as much as they have in developed countries. In fact, it is quite likely that, in developing countries, the gender-sex equivalence has not been widely questioned. As Weeks (1986) says:

...we still cannot think about sexuality without taking into account gender, or, to put it more generally, the elaborate façade of sexuality has in large part been built upon the assumption of differences between men and women, and of male dominance over women (Weeks 1986:45).

This is why it is important for this study to go back to the discussion of identity at the light of the relationship between the sexed body and gender.

Feminist scholars have provided deep insights into how Western culture has tied up sex and identity. Butler (1992) describes this interlocking by saying that, 'in order to qualify as legitimately human, one must be coherently sexed' (Butler 1992:352). Such coherence comes, of course, from being constituted by those markers of identity (dress, behaviour, body movements, desire for the different sex and for certain reproductive and sexual practices, etc.) that are culturally grouped as the meaning of one's belonging to one gender, in a direct

relation to biological sex. The importance of gender identity is such that one cannot have a socially meaningful existence outside established gender norms (Butler 1996).

This leads directly to state my position in relation to the subject of gender identity, which stands against essentialist notions that consider it a direct consequence of the sexed body. Neither is it a successful ideological imposition but, for me, as it is for several authors that I will discuss next, gender identity is constructed actively by the individual within social relations that, nonetheless, constrain her/his possibility of choice.

Butler (1996) elaborates on gender identity discussing De Beauvoir's (1981) important essay on how one is not born but rather, becomes a woman, and how such ideas de-essentialised femininity and allowed for a historical approach to the problem⁸. She argues that gender is the product of choice, not in terms of rational decision making as in the Cartesian subject, but rather as a 'pre-reflective choice', as 'the unstable product of a tacit and spontaneous act', 'an impulsive yet mindful process which can only be acknowledged a posteriori' (Butler 1996:309). Speaking about women, their participation in the construction of their own identity is described by Butler as follows:

We are not only culturally constructed, but in some sense we construct ourselves. For Beauvoir, to become a woman is a purposive and appropriate set of acts, the gradual acquisition of a skill, a 'project' in sartrian terms, to assume a culturally established corporeal style and significance (Butler 1996:303*).

Alcoff (1989) offers a similar approach to the construction of gender identity by defining it as a position, that is, as a process in which the individual actively produces meaning about him/herself. Thus, the

⁸ The long-lasting debate among feminists regarding difference and equality among the sexes cannot be justly addressed here. For a thorough discussion on these positions see Block and James (1992) and Amorós (1994).

concept of woman is not only defined by external elements which would be received and accepted passively by women, but rather they themselves are a part of the movement and contribute to the context that outlines that same position. The nature of such participation in the construction of one's subjectivity is that of interpretation and meaning.

A woman's identity is the product of her own interpretation and reconstruction of her history, through the discursive context in which her position can be delineated (Alcoff 1989:15*)

Therefore, for this research, gender identity is not ever fixed or finished but, rather, it is an ongoing construction, a daily task, in which the individual takes part, both being constituted by and transforming of those social meanings that define certain forms of femininity and masculinity as a socially legitimate way of living one's body. Sexual identity conceived from a social constructionist point of view is described by Weeks (1992b) as follows:

For identity is not a finished product but a continuing process, which is never finally achieved or completed, of shaping and reshaping into a viable narrative the fragments and diverse experiences of personal and social life, organized as they are through 'violent hierarchies' of power and difference (Weeks 1992b:404).

Identity is thus defined as a narrative, as a construction of meaning based on language and social interaction, feasible only within the constraints of a particular culture in which individual experience takes place. Such a definition underscores the importance of language in the constitution of subjectivity and sexuality⁹. This conceptualization proved particularly useful for this study because it provides a background for interpreting participants' accounts and stories precisely as narratives of identity.

These descriptions of gender and identity pose a central question regarding power, because they describe

⁹ See 4.3. **Dialogue and meaning**, below in this same chapter.

the active relationship between individuals and the institutions that intend to define their identity.

3. Agency and power.

As stated above, this study draws on Foucault's conception of power in order to understand the constitution of subjectivity through sexuality in modern societies. The ideas that I will discuss next intend to position my work in relation to contemporary debates about agency and freedom, that is, about the extent to which the individual is free in terms of how much he/she participates in his/her definition of self and how far the effects of power actually go in the construction of identity.

Foucault's idea of power has been criticized by some authors who consider that he describes power as an overwhelming and omnipresent force that leaves no room for individuality. McNay (1992) argues that, even though Foucault strives for the identification of the ways in which power mechanisms work even in the most intimate of our actions, thoughts and desires, he focuses on such strategies mainly within total institutions like the asylum and the prison, rather than in less structured social settings.

This criticism, I think, disregards the historical analysis of the invention of sexuality (Foucault 1981, 1988b), in which Foucault studies precisely the micro-mechanisms, strategies and tactics that constructed the 'sexuality device' (Foucault 1981) within the private and intimate lives and experiences of people who are embedded in social networks others than total institutions. McNay would thus miss that he often indicates that power is not a total institution nor a thing to be possessed:

Power has to be analyzed as something that circulates or, rather, as something that functions only as a chain. It is never situated here or there, it is never in the hands of somebody, it is not an attribute like wealth or goods. Power functions, it is exercised through a reticular organization. And

within its networks individuals do not only circulate, but they are also in a situation as to suffer or exercise such power, they are never the passive or consenting target of power nor are they the elements of connection. In other terms, power travels across, and it is not within individuals (Foucault 1979:144*).

This is why Foucault argues for an ascending analysis of power, that is, for the study of the microsocial mechanisms of power that are used and transformed by more global and general forms of domination, a task that is better illustrated by him in **The History of Sexuality** (Foucault 1981) regarding the creation of a discourse of sexuality that gradually took hold of the definition of the subject in Europe.

McNay (1992) seems to misunderstand Foucault's conception of power when she says that:

...Foucault slips too easily from describing disciplinary power as a **tendency** within modern forms of social control, to posing disciplinary power as a monolithic and inexorable force which saturates all social relations. This is clearly an over-statement of the efficacy of disciplinary power (McNay 1992:43).

Alcoff (1989), another feminist thinker, contributes to this debate by saying that:

I disagree, however, when they [Foucault and Derrida] seem to erase completely any spaces for the individuals to maneuver within social discourses or groups of institutions. It is this totalization of the stamp of history that I reject. In their defense of a total construction of the subject, the post-structuralists deny the ability of the subject to reflect on social discourse and disrupt his/her determinations (Alcoff 1989:6*).

I do not share these criticisms, because Foucault's writings precisely speak of the necessary presence of resistance for the exercise of power. He insists that freedom is the condition of power, in the sense that power is nothing more than an array of actions, strategies and tactics that are exercised upon others' possibilities of action in particular social settings and historical periods (Foucault 1988a). He also insists that the struggle consists of creating new ways of life that

will contest, always within microsocial relationships, the attempt of other power strategies to define and constrain our lives. He clearly speaks of choice when talking about sexual preference and practice (Foucault, 1984b).

These ideas question McNay's (1992) critique, which considers that Foucault's conception of the body is that of a passive entity upon which power stamps its own images. Foucault, would thus conceive gender, in McNay's view, more as an imposition than as a dynamic process, in which individual participation could not be exercised because of constraining and constituting processes. Foucault could reply to such criticism by recalling his concept of resistance, which is the condition for the exercise of power and is thus always present in any power relationship:

I do not oppose a substance of resistance to a substance of power. I only say that at the precise moment that there is a power relationship there is the possibility of resistance. We are never caught by power: it is always possible to modify its domination in certain conditions and according to a precise strategy (Foucault 1984a:162*).

I agree with McNay, however, that Foucault's analyses rely on the study of the ways in which institutions exert power, and that there is a need to include an analysis of those who are subjected to it. This is what this research intends to do, that is, an analysis of the experience of power, of the strategies and tactics by which individuals are constructed and construct a sense of their sexual desire and activity within social relationships.

Another important criticism to Foucault is made by several feminist thinkers (e.g. McNay 1992, Stanton 1992, Alcoff 1989 and Butler 1996) who have pointed out that Foucault suffers from a 'gender blindness' (McNay 1992), indicated by his almost absolute silence about the construction of sexual difference and gender power. According to McNay (1992):

Foucault's treatment of the body as an

undifferentiated or neutral gender is inadequate because it fails to explain how men and women relate differently to the institutions of modern life¹⁰ (McNay 1992:33).

In spite of the fact that his analysis of the 'hysterization of women's bodies' (Foucault 1981) is not taken into account in this quote, it is true that he does not work with the category of gender itself, although he frequently mentions the relationship between men and women as a particular field of power (Foucault 1984a, 1984b, 1979). In my view, what Foucault intends to do is to disrupt the conception that there are only two genders, that there are only two sexualities (male and female, as constructed by science), but that there are bodies, pleasures, activities that have been grouped and constituted as an entity -sexuality- that is supposed to tell the truth about our very being. However, he recognizes the opposing strength of women's movements that have taken the notion that 'women are sex' and used it as a strategy for social struggle:

Feminist movements have taken the glove. Are we sex by nature? OK, let us be it, but in its singularity, in its irreducible specificity. Let us take the consequences and reinvent our own kind of political, economic, cultural existence... A movement that is always the same: from that sexuality that tries to colonize them, to pierce them, on to other assertions (Foucault 1984a:153*).

So far, I have discussed the main conceptualizations of power that serve as framework for this research, as related to the issues of personal agency, because they are relevant to the notion of gender identity as a political and historical construction, in which power participates directly. Within a continuum in which total determination and free choice are the extremes, I situate the theoretical framework for this study in a middle

¹⁰ However, McNay (1992) warns against making a history of disciplinary power as exercised exclusively on women's bodies for it can turn into another expression of the artificial separation of the experiences of men and women. Thus, even though gender construction is crucial in the understanding of power, other formations like class, race, etc, are as important. This clarification seems to me a contradiction with her own previous position, because she demands Foucault to do precisely what she considers dangerous: a specific analysis of the history of the construction of the female body.

ground. The issue of freedom is here that of constrained choice. That is, identity and meaning are considered here to be constructed by individuals through their participation in social relationships and within the constraints of their particular discursive historical and cultural context. This notion of identity is relevant to the study because it relates to gender and to sexuality - if it indeed tells the truth about ourselves- and because it can be analyzed as a discursive production within the field material.

4. The role of experience in the construction of sexuality.

Within the context of the ideas presented above, this thesis aims to contribute to the debate about agency by analyzing power from the point of view of the individuals that are subjected to it, that is, not from the standpoint of the institutions that exercise power regarding sexuality, but from the subjects' experience of such techniques. Power functions through discourses of truth, which serve as frameworks for the construction of meaning throughout the whole social network. As said at the beginning of this chapter, I will now turn to the first of four major sources of meaning that can be considered as constructing the individual experience of sexuality.

4.1. Social discourses and experience

As Foucault (1981) argued, sexuality has been constructed through certain discursive practices that have intended to produce truth through knowledge and, therefore, have served as strategies of power. In this sense:

... the meanings we give to sexuality and the body are socially organized and sustained by a variety of languages which seek to tell us what is sex, what it ought to be, and what it could be (Weeks 1992a:225).

Science and medicine, family planning policies, formal education and religion seem to coexist as competing discourses that intend to define, create and produce sexuality. The ways in which subjects construct meaning about their bodies, sexual practices and pleasures reflect the ways in which they relate to such social discourses in the construction of their subjectivities.

However socially pervasive those discourses may be in Mexico, what matters in this research is the experience of subjects in relation to them. It is considered here that as much as subjects are constituted by dominant discourses, they also have the possibility to maneuver within that discursive domain, taking a position -although not rationally- before them, according to their ability to encompass wide parts of their experience of sexuality. Therefore, it is not of interest to this research to determine through what processes certain discourses of sexuality became dominant in contemporary Mexican society, but to describe how individuals position themselves in relation to them. Therefore, this thesis intends to do what Stanton (1992) describes as:

... the concern with agency and resistance, beyond the recognition that the self is interpellated and constructed, should lead to more intensive analyses of the ways in which specific subjects operate within -and against- sexual discourses in specific situations. Such work will help to elaborate more dynamic and nuanced models of the relations among discourses and subjects, and their effects on each other (Stanton 1992:44).

It is this kind of analysis that I intend to offer, that is, an analysis that will try to account for the intersection between sexual discourses and subjectivity which, in the case of this study, is provided by the concept of experience. To look at subjectivity through the notion of experience came from the idea that power is exercised upon the body itself by local and diffuse strategies within singular situations in which certain economy of forces is played. Furthermore, as Foucault

says, 'power is not just a theoretical question, but it is a part of our experience' (Foucault 1988a:228*).

Based on a phenomenological approach to subjectivity and meaning, the concept of experience offered me a way to construct the object of this research because power and sexuality do not exist independently of the experience of subjects, which are constituted by it. Therefore, the present work relies heavily on two major theoretical cornerstones derived from phenomenology:

- the concept of sexuality as the subjective experience of the body, its pleasures and activities, constructed within the discursive context of a certain historical period and a particular culture.

- meaning as dialogically and socially constructed through interaction marked by cultural frameworks available to an individual belonging to a certain community¹¹.

Experience is thus understood as the way in which the subject makes objects of reality a part of his sphere of property (Mier 1995) by interacting with them. In this sense, Bruner says that:

...lived experience, then, as thought and desire, as word and image, is the primary reality (Bruner 1986a:5).

Culture is experienced as well, because it is about how events are received by consciousness, be those events emotions, bodily sensations, discourses or activities that can be called sexual or relate to sexuality.

My view of experience is that it is not a passive process, nor a purely perceptual reception -although it involves our senses and body capacities- but, rather, that it is culturally constructed in that it implies the interpretation of events in order to produce meaning about them, about our relation to them, and about our identity.

This interpretive process is marked by what Bruner

¹¹ See chapter III: **The negotiation of meaning through dialogue: the method.**

(1986a) calls dominant narratives, a concept that echoes Foucault's accounts of dominant discourses in the sense that every historical era produces a set of narratives that intend to express experience and also to constitute it, because they become the dominant construction of meaning that define subjectivities, sexualities and identities within a culture.

The importance of dominant narratives is that they become the major interpretive devices to organize and communicate experience, but remain largely unexamined. Only in a later time period, in a different social place, or in a new phase of history can we adopt the perspective that enables us to see the narratives for what they are - social constructions (Bruner 1986a:18).

This quote brings to mind the notion of the will of truth that Foucault (1981) has discussed regarding, for instance, all discourses that defined sexuality as essential and natural to the individual. Of course, such narratives are never equivalent to reality, nor describe what actually happened -for this is impossible-, but rather, they are units of meaning that intend to make sense of the flow of life, and that are interpretive in nature. Reality, experience and its expressions are in continuous tension, because they do not exhaust nor encompass each other, just as they belong to a never-ending process of construction of meaning. In fact, the relationship between experience and its expressions is:

...clearly dialogic and dialectical, for experience structures expressions, in that we understand other people and their expressions on the basis of our own experience and self-understanding. But expressions also structure experience, in that dominant narratives of a historical era, important rituals and festivals, and classic works of art define and illuminate inner experience (Bruner 1986a:6)

The same applies to narratives individuals tell -to themselves and to others- in order to express their experience. Because this experience is not directly available to others it can only be known through its manifestations, that is, through language, bodily movements and other expressions. It is because we cannot

share another person's experience that we construct narratives or participate in cultural events. These devices intend to transcend the solitude of experience by providing a common framework for interpretation within a culture. Although language is not the only mechanism through which we try to make our experience available to others, narratives are powerful elements for the construction of one's identity in relation to the group because through this activity the flow of experience is organized and shared with others. However, language can never express experience completely. As Bruner argues:

...life experience is richer than discourse. Narrative structures organize and give meaning to experience, but there are always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story (Bruner 1986b:143).

Experience can be diffuse and vague, associated with sensations, thoughts and emotions that cannot always be translated into words, and many areas of subjectivity are not available to the linguistic consciousness of the subject, and are excluded from his/her narrative identity. Still, in order to give meaning to the disorderly world of experience, we resort to language:

Since the stories that persons have about their lives determine both the ascription of meaning to experience and the selection of those aspects of experience that are to be given expression, these stories are constitutive or shaping persons' lives (White and Epston 1990:40).

Stories of experience, however, are not isolated individual expressions but, rather, they are a process concerned with the construction of meaning closely linked to power, that is, to the dominant narratives of the culture of the teller. As Bruner (1986a) indicates:

...dominant narratives are units of power as well as of meaning. The ability to tell one's story has a political component; indeed, one measure of the dominance of a narrative is the space allocated to it in the discourse. Alternative, competing stories are generally not allocated space in establishment channels and must seek expression in underground media and dissident groupings (Bruner 1986a:19).

Therefore, what the concept of experience brings for this research is the possibility of analyzing how sexuality is constructed from the point of view of the individual, in the context of dominant and subjugated social discursivity. The notion of dominant and alternative narratives embedded in the previous quote draws from Foucault's concept of subjugated knowledges, which he defines as those local and indigenous knowledges that are currently in circulation but that have been denied the space in which they could be expressed and reproduced, because they are not considered the truth, which is exclusive to global and central knowledges like scientific discourse (White and Epston 1990). These knowledges survive in the margins of society and have the potential to question 'the effects of the centralizing powers which are linked to the institution' (Foucault 1980:84). Thus Foucault argues for the 'insurrection' of such knowledges in order to resist the constitutive power of scientific discourse.

This concept has a great potential for this research, because it will help to trace the different discursive powers that pierce subjectivity, and to identify the participants' experience of power by locating their position before such discourses, as well as their strategies and tactics for resisting them.

4.2. Local discourses and culture

In the past section, the term 'social discourses' referred to those dominant discursive formations that permeate society and are national and/or global in character. In relation to sexuality, examples of these could be the media, sexual education in schools, and medical and religious discourses.

However, these national and global discourses are not homogeneously distributed or disseminated among all cultural groups in a national culture, rather, they are appropriated and/or resisted by local communities, which

in the process of constructing their own culture, transform these dominant narratives into local versions.

Local agents, apart from producing their own stories about sexuality and cultural identity, interact diversely with social discourses, interpreting them in accordance to their own cultural frameworks and mixing them in particular ways. Thus, the individual's experience is conformed as an interaction with sexual dominant discourses framed by the possibilities of interpretation that local cultures provide.

This is why it is important for this research to analyze the role of local constructions of the meaning of sexuality, not as a mere context in which individual meaning is produced, but as a key element that participates in the production of a particular subjectivity and sexuality in any given culture.

Local agents of sexual discourses could be defined as those members of the community that have been granted certain degree of authority to define the meanings of sexual practices. They could be religious or civil authorities, parents, those in charge of ritual practices, and even peers. These characters are part of the immediate social group to which the individual belongs, and produce certain truths about sexuality, accepted and legitimated by the community, to which the subject relates in different degrees of appropriation or resistance.

When Ross and Rapp (1984) talk about the social embeddedness of sexuality, they consider that any description of sexuality must always take into account a) kinship and family systems, b) sexual regulations and definitions of communities and c) national and world systems, because they act simultaneously as limits and prescriptions of sexual meanings and behaviours. Although these authors consider such three elements as contexts for sexual behaviour -and this is not my vision of the process-, and their analysis of local strategies for the control of sexuality is centered on structural processes

like availability of resources for marriage or the control and distribution of possible sex partners in any given culture, their consideration of these three levels of the construction of sexuality sheds light on the complexity of the problem, especially regarding the relationship of local traditions to national and global discourses.

The amount of autonomy from wider institutions that community practice expresses varies widely... Priests and parsons, while important members of the community and influenced by its values, are also representatives of powerful national and international organizations (Ross and Rapp 1984:115).

This approach to sexuality differs slightly from the one in this research because it looks at the relationship between sexual behaviour and social structures in a rather causal manner, giving preeminence to social and economical determinants over culture. Rather, this study tends to see the relation between structure and culture as a mutually determining one, in which meanings -in this case of sexuality- do not emerge only as justifications for certain forms of social organization, but also exert a considerable influence on them.

Most anthropological studies relevant to this topic have focused on gender issues brought about by kinship and family systems and how social structures define inequalities between men and women. As Ortner and Whitehead (1981a) point out:

In contemporary feminist anthropology, in turn, kinship and marriage organization was the obvious place to start looking for important insights into the ways in which cultures construe gender, sexuality and reproduction (Ortner and Whitehead 1981a:11).

In fact, this work is an interesting example of the path the discipline was taking in the 1980's in order to account for gender. The volume (Ortner and Whitehead 1981b) analyzes gender by offering ethnographic accounts of different cultures in which the meanings of womanhood and manhood contest certain constructions considered

universal. For instance, Collier and Rosaldo (1981) discuss the possible reasons why in certain simple societies motherhood is not placed as the centre of women's lives, thus showing a meaning of sexual difference that does not fit with what is generally considered universal.

A social constructionist approach to gender is suggested in these articles because they question sexual essentialism through cross-cultural comparison. However, sexuality is not conceptualized in the same manner, because its biological character remains unexamined. It seems that the authors' main purpose was to highlight that:

We believe that there are **no** facts about human sexual biology that, in and of themselves, have immediate social meanings or institutional consequences (Collier and Rosaldo 1981:315)¹².

So that, even though the title of the book is **Sexual meanings**, from its contents and descriptions it seems that sexuality is reduced to sexual differences. They are treated as equivalent to gender, for the discussions centre around the relationship between the sexes within social organizations like kinship and marriage, and not on sexual practices and their meaning, be them related or not to local definitions of gender.

In a manner closer to the object of this study, Vance (1991) grants communities a relative autonomy in the process of construction of meaning.

That dominant sectors, particularly the state, religion and the professional groups exercise a disproportionate influence on the sexual discourse does not mean that their views are hegemonic or unchallenged by other groups. Nor does it mean that marginal groups only respond reactively and do not create their own subcultures and worlds of meaning (Vance 1991:881).

Although anthropology has been dedicated to the description of local cultures, sexuality has not been considered an issue to be investigated in its own right.

¹² The stress is original.

Furthermore, the study and analysis of how meanings of sexuality are constructed is even a less studied field because, as said before, sexual behaviour and patterning have been granted greater interest than their cultural meanings.

In a review of anthropological work on sexuality, Vance recalls the pioneer works of Malinowski (1929/1941) and Mead (1923)¹³ as part of what she calls the 'cultural influence model' of sexuality, which has permeated many anthropological works on the subject ever since. Such approach considers culture as a shaping force of sexual practice, leaving sexuality as a universal and biologically determined 'drive' or 'impulse', and therefore endorsing the idea that:

...sexual acts carry stable and universal significance in terms of identity and subjective meaning (Vance 1991:879).

This model acknowledges variations in sexual culture in terms of regulation or encouragement, but not in the meaning of behaviour itself. This is expressed by the frequent use of terms like 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual', or 'female and male sexuality' as if they were universal categories. The meaning of the sexual was taken for granted as if naturally embedded in all humans, and only its expressions were considered to be moulded by culture. The value of this model was that it found variations in sexual cultures around the world, therefore rejecting obvious forms of essentialism and universalism. However, it is assumed that sexuality is universally and biologically determined and so it did not question the cultural relativity of the concept of sexuality itself.

In another review of the works of anthropology of women, Rapp (1979) indicates that research on sexuality has been included as the study of cultural contexts of

¹³ Although Mead's work discussed the subject of adolescent sexuality and virginity in a non-Western culture, what is relevant for this thesis is the fact that she inaugurated sexuality as a valid area of research for anthropology, although her approach stated a clear separation between biology and culture. Apart from the criticism that her fieldwork has deserved (Freeman 1984), it is her implicit conception of sexuality what concerns this chapter.

sexual practices and reproduction, the sources of which were considered biological. According to her, there is a cross-cultural variation in the culture of sexuality that still needs to be documented.

Such works show that biology itself is mute; it speaks only through cultural constructions that people make of their experiences. When we take it cross-culturally, sexuality takes on expanded meanings (Rapp 1979:503).

Another area of anthropological research in which sexuality has been dealt with, although in a marginal way, is that of the private/public dichotomy associated to gender and its expressions cross-culturally. Arguing against a rigid separation between these social milieux, Rapp (1979) mentions that, for instance, in Mediterranean cultures (of which Mexico inherits many aspects), women's sexual purity becomes an issue that needs to be controlled, while for Western culture the distinction between public and private does not centre on the importance of women's purity.

All these works have fruitfully documented the contexts for gender inequality, reproduction and sometimes sexual practices, but few of them have discussed the process through which cultures construct the meanings of sexual activity. Rather, sexuality has been considered more of a reflection of other and more important and determining structures, and an expression of social relations different to itself.

All this work has thoroughly proven the cultural variability of sexuality, but there is still a need to look at the process through which local constructions of sexuality, based both on social discourses and local traditions, customs and narratives, are developed. However, the intention of this chapter is not to describe concrete local discourses, but to focus on the individual's experience of such discourses or, even more precisely, to pose the question of how he/she relates to the local and social agents of sexual discourses in order

to construct his/her experience of sexuality. Again, I intend to trace in individuals' stories and accounts both social and local voices regarding sexuality, and their position before them. It is of particular interest to this chapter to discuss theoretically how such process could unfold, from the point of view of phenomenological approaches to culture and construction of meaning.

In order to do this, it is important to recall, in the community level, the dimensions of time and process, as well as the contraction of space that has happened in modern history, thanks to global migration and communication. A 'postmodern turn' (Sarup 1989) that stresses cultural change through time and contact between social groups, has influenced anthropology and other social sciences during the past decade.

Many approaches to sexuality and gender could be criticized because they fail to take these processes into account in their attempt to identify a determining structure that underlies and explains such systems, thus considering social and economic organizations rather fixed and stable. This conceptualizations deny the complexity of the global world today, in which boundaries between cultures have been blurred or even erased, producing an intense flow of persons, goods, discourses and practices in which the originality or locality of individuals and societies is impossible to determine anymore. As Rosaldo (1991) says:

In the present postcolonial world the notion of an authentic culture as an autonomous and internally coherent universe does not hold, except maybe as a 'useful fiction' or a revealing distortion... Increasing global interdependence has made it clear that neither 'us' nor 'them' are as well linked, or as homogeneous as it was once the case (Rosaldo 1991:198*).

Closed, traditional cultures no longer exist, and the result of this process is the loss of stability in what once were considered solid patterns of social action and meaning. Thus, culture is considered here as an emergent production and not as a regular structure that

can be deduced from its manifestations like language, ritual or social organization.

In what they call 'the emergence of culture' Mannheim and Tedlock (1995) express the idea that cultures are:

... continuously produced, reproduced and revised in dialogues among their members. Cultural events are not the sum of the actions of their individual participants, each of whom imperfectly expresses a pre-existent pattern, but are the scenes where shared culture emerges from interaction (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995:2).

In this quote there is a key element that takes part in the emergence of culture: dialogue. This concept involves a particular conception of language not as an abstract structure, but as an ongoing process of interaction in which subjects and culture are constituted by their multiple relationships and verbal exchanges, which in turn express different conceptions of the world. In Mannheim and Tedlock's words:

To propose that language and culture are dialogical at their core is to relocate them in the interstices between people... (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995:9).

Just like any other aspect of culture, the social construction of sexuality emerges from such dialogical processes and interactions.

I consider that this particular social research is of a dialogical nature itself, because it is born from the relationship between researcher and participants and, rather than getting to know the other's culture as if it were a coherent and alien whole, the encounter produced a specific construction framed by the nature of the interaction. This is also the case of ethnography because:

...[it] is a peculiar kind of dialogue and a peculiar zone of emergence, at once constitutive of and constituted by radical cultural difference (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995:15).¹⁴

¹⁴ I will discuss the implications of such dialogical approach in chapter III: **The negotiation of meaning through dialogue: the method.**

In this sense, this study is located within the reflexive trend of social research, because it takes into account that it is a joint construction between researcher and participants, who were involved in a power relationship that inevitably produces an imbalance in the voices included.

The problem of representation appears here as an inevitable political issue to be discussed, because any analysis of others' cultures or stories causes some sort of violence, because the researcher mediates between the participants and the audience for which the study is written, transforming the voices he/she collected in the field (Behar 1995).

Ethnography and empirical social research have produced a huge amount of information in which 'others' are constructed, those 'others' being frequently non-Western cultures and groups. Thus, such descriptions that start from a standpoint of a supposed researcher's cultural invisibility (Rosaldo 1991) conceal the fact that her/his perspective is itself a point of view as any other, that must be analyzed and deconstructed. Rosaldo (1991) says that the construction of these 'others' has aided in the colonizing endeavour of the West because the groups studied have been mostly those that could either be useful, or that could pose a threat to Western culture, mainly to capitalist expansion.

These 'others' have been described, analyzed and represented in vast amounts of anthropological and social research without making room for the expression of their own voices, and therefore, suppressing the political strength such groups may acquire by telling their story themselves. Sampson argues that:

The dominant groups have given priority to their own experiences and their places in the world and have constructed serviceable others; that is, others constructed to be of service to the dominant groups' own needs, values, interests and points of view (Sampson 1993:4).

Interpretive anthropology has made a critique of

such claim of representation and construction of others, by assuming that researchers do not depict nor speak for the culture they visit but, rather, that they interpret or even dialogue with its members. By taking the actor-centered point of view of cultural phenomena and considering it as a text to be interpreted or read, interpretive anthropologists make a relativization of their work. However, there is still a hierarchy between the anthropologists' and the natives' discourses, and one of the main examples of this problem has been the absence of actual conversations carried out with natives in final research reports (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995).

This study goes a bit further onto this line of thought, because it considers fieldwork as a dialogue in which participants' voices are gathered and presented in actual conversations between them and myself. This is not to deny the power differential and the violence exerted in the production, selection, analysis and interpretation of such texts. On the contrary, with Behar (1995) I assume the responsibility of interpreting such conversations by performing a reading of the texts that emerge from them. The difference here is that I do not interpret the participants' expressions as representative of their culture in general, but as a particular performance of meaning in which I also interpret my own discourse in the context of the conversation. I agree with Behar (1995) when she explains her ideas about the method of life history:

The life history text is not meaningful in itself: it is constituted in its interpretation, its reading. Reading a life history text, and then writing it, calls for an interpretation of cultural themes as they are creatively constructed by the actor within a particular configuration of social forces and gender and class contexts; and, at the same time, a closer analysis of the making of the life history narrative as a narrative, using critical forms of textual analysis and self-reflexive (rather than self-ingratiating) mediation on the relationship between the storyteller and the anthropologist (Behar 1995:152).

The idea of culture and social action as text is

hinted in this quote as a major conceptualization. Developed by Geertz (1973, 1983) and carried on by many anthropologists after him, this theoretical framework conceives the descriptions researchers make of other peoples' or groups' cultures as processes by which meaning is attached to a text produced by both researcher and participant. Therefore, the notion of reading the conversations as texts is the most expressive of this study's intention, because it considers such field materials as an emerging cultural process in which researcher and participants jointly produced a certain social construction of sexuality, framed by social and local discourses and expressed through the description of experience. In this sense, this work intends to be dialogic because it includes a self-reflexive analysis of the participation of the researcher in the production of field information.

4.3. Dialogue and meaning.

So far, I have discussed the interaction between social and local discourses on the one hand, and the individual's experience in the construction of meaning on the other, particularly of sexuality. Now I will turn to analyze how this process is carried out from the point of view of what I consider a social psychology that draws from a certain conception of subjectivity as constructed by dialogue within social interaction.

Although the authors that I include in this section do not call themselves social psychologists (Bakhtin 1981, 1986 and Voloshinov 1927/1976, 1929/1973), they do address the issue of the constitution of subjectivity from the point of view of social history and politics. They do not carry out such an endeavour by constructing an evolutionary theory of socialization or of child development but, rather, they consider that the subject is constituted by social languages. This idea goes against the modern and organismic conception of the

unitary and autonomous individual that 'interacts' with her/his environment as she/he enters the social world, in favour of a more dynamic conceptualization of the subject as pierced and marked by culture. The fact that neither Voloshinov nor Bakhtin are psychologists does not mean they do not contribute to the current debates of subjectivity. In fact, Wertsch (1991) -a psychologist himself- has gathered these authors' views -along with Vygotsky's theory- in order to discuss what he calls the 'mind'.

Thus, following a phenomenological approach based on Bakhtin and Voloshinov's ideas, I use the concept of experience to analyze meaning as a process of negotiation in which different social languages and perspectives are expressed by participants of conversations.

Both these authors consider that subjectivity is the product of social interaction -especially verbal interaction- and that it is constructed outside the individual, through her/his relationships with others. Subjectivity does not have an existence outside language, and it is not a thing to be discovered by scientific instruments. For Voloshinov (1929/1973), psychic experience can only be understood as a semiotic process, because the sign is the encounter between the individual and the outside world. In terms of subjectivity, there is no other reality than that of the sign, even in inner speech and experience, because although there are physiological and organic processes that take place in the brain, subjective experience can only be constructed through language and, furthermore, through dialogue.

Signs emerge, after all, only in the process of interaction between one individual consciousness and another. And the individual consciousness itself is filled with signs. Consciousness becomes consciousness only once it has been filled with ideological (semiotic) content, consequently, only in the process of social interaction... (Voloshinov 1929/1973:11).

Along the same line, Voloshinov argues that there is no experience outside of sign. In fact, according to him:

It is not experience that organizes expression, but the other way around - expression organizes experience. Expression is what first gives experience its form and specificity or direction (Voloshinov 1929/1973:85)

Consequently, the conversations read for this research are the main corpus of data of experience, not because they express a prior state of mind or subjectivity of the speakers, but because they themselves constitute experience -in this case of sexuality- as they are spoken¹⁵. Voloshinov's concept of the sign considers that it is not only shaped by the social organization to which the speakers belong, but also and at the same time by the immediate conditions of their interaction. The analysis of the conversations here presented will acknowledge both levels of determinacy.

Thus, for these authors, subjectivity is always dialogical, even in inner speech, because it always assumes the existence of a listener, an addressee, whether imaginary or not, to which the utterances are directed¹⁶. Subjectivity is social as well, because the individual in isolation does not invent such utterances¹⁷, but they are already laid out by the social history of her/his group, even though she/he may print a specific accent or nuance to that social language.

Voloshinov's conception of the psyche as a semiotic process that occurs in between individuals points to its social character, for words are always already tinged with history and ideology and reflect certain conceptions of the world determined by class conditions, so that sign becomes an arena of class struggle (Voloshinov

¹⁵ For this thesis' conceptualization of the relationship between experience and language, see 4.1. **Social discourses and experience** in this same chapter.

¹⁶ The concept of addressee in Bakhtin (1981) does not limit such a character to the immediate listener, but also to others socially, temporally or spatially distant.

¹⁷ Our experience of ourselves is always incomplete and partial; we cannot see our complete body and so, according to Bakhtin, the self is a gift from the other, who gives us back, through his/her gaze and word, a total description of ourselves via dialogue (Sampson 1993).

1929/1973). This is why he considers the word as an index of social change, and even more so of transformations that are still occurring.

Such a notion of language and subjectivity is particularly relevant to this study because I will analyze discourse of sexuality as an index of social change: that of the construction of meaning of sexuality amidst a dynamic process of cultural hybridization that is taking place in Mexico, in which many social languages are competing to become dominant. Furthermore, I intend to show that such hybridization is expressed within the utterance, in the discourse of individuals that are themselves involved and influenced by such process of change. This intention is possible because hybridization is:

... a mixture of two [or more] social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousness, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor (Bakhtin 1981:358).

This quote introduces a central idea in Bakhtin's theory, which says that language implies a tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces (Bakhtin 1981). That is, that there is a tendency to centralize and unify meaning, to produce a unitary language which allows for the construction of a national language and therefore for the understanding among individuals and social groups within a national society. This centripetal force is put to work by dominant social groups in their struggle to impose their own conception of the world.

But, at the same time, there is a centrifugal force that stratifies and fragments ideological thought into multiple views of the world (Morris 1994a). This centrifugal force is what Bakhtin called heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981), and it is a fundamental element in the process of change of any language and culture because it opens up the possibility of introducing non-dominant languages and of working against the monological tendency

of the languages imposed by dominant social groups¹⁸.

But before we go on discussing how heteroglossia is relevant to this study, there is a need to elaborate two major concepts that have been used in this chapter but that have not been yet defined: those of discourse and of meaning, both central to my theoretical and methodological approach.

Regarding discourse, this thesis, supported on Bakhtin's theory of language, is critical of the scope of linguistics because structural approaches to language discard precisely what is most important: the utterance, that is, language as it is used and performed in speech. Bakhtin's concept of discourse is therefore linked mainly to the communicative aspects of language, because he considers every word a response to other's words, within a dialogic and never-ending process.

Thus discourse -the production of actualized meaning- can be studied adequately only as a communicative event, as responsive interaction between at least two social beings. Language exists on that creative borderzone and boundary between human consciousnesses, between a self and an other (Morris 1994a:5).

The study of the utterance, of language in its concrete living totality (Bakhtin 1963/1984) -in contrast to the abstract system of linguistics- is what he called metalinguistics¹⁹ because it goes beyond disciplinary boundaries and because it considers its object to be double-voiced discourse, that is, produced by the relationship of the speaker to his/her own utterance and to those of others.

Someone else's words introduced into our own speech inevitably assume (our own) interpretation and become subject to our evaluation of them; that is, they become double-voiced. All that can vary is the

¹⁸ This assertion is closely related to the concept of dominant and subjugated knowledges that Foucault discusses elsewhere (Foucault 1979). See 4.1. **Social discourses and experience**, above in this same chapter.

¹⁹ Wertsch (1991) stresses that the term "translinguistics" is more appropriate because of the misuse the prefix "meta" has suffered lately.

interrelationship between these two voices (Bakhtin 1963/1984 in Morris 1994b:107).

In this context, meaning does not belong to the word or to the soul of the speaker (Voloshinov 1929/1973), but it comes into existence in between the speakers, in the process of understanding. Meaning is active, rather than fixed or static, because it can only exist in the encounter of at least two voices, in a responsive process by which the voice of a listener responds to the voice of a speaker (Wertsch 1991).

This rejection of literal meaning as the starting point of a theory of language is particularly relevant to this study because it grounds the conception of meaning as constructed during conversations and dialogues, rather than as an abstract system to be discovered by an observer. Also, this conception allows for a full reflexivity of the analysis of conversations, considering their dialogical nature.

In the same sense, Voloshinov's notion of understanding involves interaction, because:

Any true understanding is dialogical in nature. Understanding is to utterance as one line of dialogue to the next. Understanding strives to match the speaker's word with a **counterword**²⁰ (Voloshinov 1929/1973:102).

Such dialogical nature of meaning is considered valid also in terms of culture by the anthropologists of experience²¹ who say that:

...we have in culture an uncontrollable plurality, such that the production of meaning can never be contained and we can never know in advance the constructions that will be placed in a text. Texts are radically open and plural, and there are no limits on meaning (Bruner 1986a:24).

This plurality takes us back to a discussion interrupted above, that of the concept of heteroglossia.

²⁰ The stress is original.

²¹ See part 4.1. **Social discourses and experience**, above in this same chapter.

The relevance of such concept for this thesis is that meaning on sexuality in Mexico is now being constituted by competing discourses -or social languages- that struggle with each other and with subjugated discourses produced locally or even individually. Such discursive heterogeneity is not only expressed at the level of social discourses on sexuality, but also in the individual consciousness, in which such competing discourses also fight for dominance. For instance, family planning and scientific discourses encouraged and disseminated by the Government clash with the still dominant discourses of Catholicism regarding reproduction and sexuality. This struggle is not only happening within the media, the school or the family, but also in the consciousness -to use Voloshinov's term- of those individuals subjected to the influence of such discourses.

Heteroglossia is an expression of the ideological character of language and of social stratification, in terms of discourse reflecting social classes' conceptions of the world. In fact, language is not unitary, but it expresses a co-existence of contradictory ideologies, groups and even epochs in the same utterance (Bakhtin 1981). This population of discourses is reflected in every day speech in what Bakhtin called 'polyphony' (Bakhtin 1963/1984), which is the presence of a multiplicity of voices within our own utterances, to which we relate in very different ways, in terms of the authority we grant them.

Our practical everyday speech is full of other people's words and with some of them we completely merge our own voice, forgetting whose they are and others, which we take as authoritative, we use to reinforce our own words; still others, finally, we populate with our own aspirations, alien or hostile to them (Bakhtin 1963/1984 quoted in Morris 1994b:107).

The evidence for polyphony and heteroglossia lies in reported speech, which is defined as:

...the mechanism whereby one voice (the 'reporting voice') reports the utterance of another (the

'reported voice') (Wertsch 1991:80).

This process is expressed in the common use of citations of other people's words in our own speech. Here are two examples of reported speech:

- 1) She said, 'I went to the meeting!'
- 2) She said that she had rushed to the meeting.

The first case is an example of direct discourse, which intends to quote the exact words of other person, while the second, indirect discourse, is tinged and transformed by the analytic orientation (Wertsch 1991) that the speaker gives to the other's words. In 1) there is a tendency to maintain the integrity and originality of the reported utterance, while the second (2) is open to the speaker's evaluation and becomes, therefore, an example of double-voicedness. This is expressed in the fact that the words are not quoted in first person, as uttered by the reported speaker, but in third person. Also, the reporting speaker introduces the verb 'rushed' as an evaluation (2). This shows the simultaneous presence of reporting and reported speakers in the same utterance, that is, its double-voicedness.

For Bakhtin, these differences in reported speech are related to the authority that the reported utterance has for the speaker. Direct discourse allows for no dialogue between the voices; it is only transmitted, but not represented and, therefore, it speaks of what Bakhtin called 'authoritative discourse' (Bakhtin 1981). Indirect discourse, on the contrary, consists of an 'interanimation' of voices in which the reporting speaker introduces his/her position before the other's utterance. This kind of speech is closer to 'internally persuasive discourse' (Bakhtin 1981) in that it does interact in various degrees with the voice of the reported speaker.

A word of caution, however, against making direct discourse equivalent to authoritative discourse or indirect speech equivalent of internally persuasive discourse, for the authority of an utterance is not

always expressed this way²². In any case, what makes authoritative discourse so resistant to the speaker's intonations is the assumption that meanings are fixed and cannot be transformed by other voices. Bakhtin uses examples from religious, political and moral texts, or the voices of parents, adults and teachers to illustrate this kind of discourse. A text like this is not a generator of meaning (Wertsch 1991), because:

It enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. It is indissolubly fused with its authority -with political power, an institution, a person- and it stands or falls together with that authority (Bakhtin 1981:343).

On the contrary, internally persuasive discourse is open to transformation and evaluation and thus becomes a generator of new meanings as it comes in dialogical contact with other voices within the same utterance.

Bakhtin makes an important relationship between heteroglossia and what he calls 'individual consciousness' (Bakhtin 1981) because the co-existence and struggle of different social languages within consciousness allows for making relative the monologic claims of certain dominant discourses, by showing their contours clearly as they are contrasted with other social discourses that are diverse or even opposed to them. The absoluteness of an authoritative social language is questioned in the dialogical process of heteroglossia.

The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born from another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse. This process is made more complex by the fact that a variety of alien voices enter consciousness (just as they struggle with one

²² For instance, the use of words and terms of scientific jargon by a peasant girl that has been attending school for the last few years -a participant of this research - sounds alien in her utterance, even though she does not quote them as direct discourse.

another in surrounding social reality) (Bakhtin 1981:348)²³.

In terms of the object of this research, which is the social construction of sexuality from the standpoint of the experience of individuals, heteroglossia and polyphony are useful concepts because they allow for the analysis of how participants position themselves before different voices regarding sexuality; which of them represent dominant social languages and which is their own. That is, apart from showing which discourses are struggling for social dominance, this theoretical approach allows for the analysis of the degrees of autonomy or submission of participants to authoritative social languages regarding sexuality. This should shed some light about the process of construction of one's own voice regarding sexual desire, pleasure and reproduction in the face of the attempt of imposition of certain social discourses.

4.4. The experience of the body.

The last source of meaning for the social construction of sexuality that I want to address is the body, but not from the standpoint of the dichotomous conception of the physiological body as the frontier of nature against culture but, rather, of the body as constituted and expressed by certain power techniques, discursive practices and social languages. I do not intend to ignore the role of physiology in sexual activity, but to say, along with authors such as Foucault (1979, 1981, 1985), Turner (1989) and Laqueur (1990), that the body is a cultural as well as a biological product, in such a way that there is no possibility of establishing the limits to where culture operates on

²³ There is much more to reported speech in Bakhtin's work than it is possible or relevant to describe here, for he devoted himself to the study of polyphony mainly in literature. This concept was particularly developed in his analysis of Dostoyevsky's works (Bakhtin 1963/1984).

nature in its transformation of bodies.

In the area of sexuality, this conception is intertwined with the cultural construction of gender, because sex and gender have been related historically in such a way as to almost consider them synonymous or mutually determining. However, many studies (Laqueur 1990) have shown that what was considered as biological - sex- and therefore natural, has also been culturally constructed, mainly by medical and scientific discourse²⁴. As Butler has said:

...gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or a 'natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture (Butler in McNay 1992:7).

The relevance of these issues for this study lies in the fact that there is no body outside the experienced body, according to the phenomenological approach that I have been arguing for and that this experienced body is itself constituted by power. Therefore, I do not consider discourses of the body as representations of the physiological entity but as constitutive practices that define its experience and give it meaning within a set of culturally available frameworks.

There is no experience of the body that is not mediated -that is, constituted and oriented- by a series of social practices and discursive and symbolic categories that are not simply attachments to the object itself, but the object's essential determinants (Pérez 1991:13*).

Just as there are social discourses that define sexuality, there is a process of subjectivization (Pérez 1991) in which the individual ascribes meaning to his/her own body, in the interaction with his/her culture. In fact, the experience of the body is a fundamental element in the construction of identity, for the latter is the result of a relationship of the individual to his/her

²⁴ One of the reasons for this is precisely that a body is never exclusively male nor female but the need for defining it as such became urgent during the previous century, with the emergence of the modern sciences of sexuality (Weeks 1995).

body and to others that provide information which informs such a self-definition. This definition echoes Foucault's conceptions of 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1991) in that the body is constructed by certain activities, discourses and even disciplines applied by the subject to him/herself, within the socially dominant definitions of what is sexual.

Along the same phenomenological definition of subjectivity that Bakhtin argues -in the sense that the self is only acquired as a gift from the other through dialogic interaction²⁵- Pérez defines identity as:

... a dialogue with oneself, with the body that is mediated by the presence of the other in the horizon of experience (Pérez 1991:19*).

Therefore, I will look at the expressions of the experience of the body provided by the participants, and at the voices they quote as they describe it, in terms of their dominance or resistance. This is interesting because it will show in action the process of social construction of the sexed body as carried out by individuals in certain cultural conditions.

Such conditions are expressed in the fact that the social construction of the body and its sexual character has changed along with the social languages that have intended to define it during different epochs and in different cultures. Even though the Western definitions provided first by religion and later by science are prevailing in the globalized world, subjugated discourses still exist within the heteroglot struggle for the definition of sexuality in Mexico today. This process was the subject of the previous chapter, which described different perspectives on how sexuality has been constructed in Mexican culture, taking into account the clash of prehispanic and European cultures during the Colonial period, and the modern discourses of science that have circulated since the past century.

This chapter has delineated the theoretical

²⁵ See previous section: 4.3. **Dialogue and meaning.**

framework that served as the platform for the construction of the object of study, as well as for the design of a method of analysis and interpretation of field materials, that could shed light about the social construction of sexuality by looking at the experience of the participants and the researcher, through the analysis of their discourses within conversations.

**THE NEGOTIATION OF MEANING THROUGH DIALOGUE:
THE METHOD¹**

In the previous chapters I have outlined both the historical and cultural background regarding the social construction of sexuality in Mexico, and the theoretical approaches that serve as framework for this research. In this chapter I will discuss the method I designed and followed in order to analyze the object of study, that is, the dialogic construction of meaning and the experience of first sexual intercourse for certain individuals that are immersed in hybrid cultural conditions where different discourses compete for dominance.

1. The situated dialogue: politics of research.

I have mentioned four main processes that constitute different sources of meaning: social and local discourses, dialogue, and the experience of the body². In this chapter, I will explain how I interpreted my own and participants' discourses from the standpoint of experience, that is, how we dealt with all these elements in our construction of the meaning of sexuality.

In order to do this, I invited participants to talk about the meanings they attached to their first sexual intercourse, in order to be able to study how these meanings related to dominant and alternative discourses. In accordance with this conceptualization, the field material gathered for this research is considered to be a particular construction that emerged within a dialogue between myself and the participants. Important

¹ I thank Dr. Victor Seidler for his valuable comments on the first draft of this chapter.

² See chapter II: **Subjectivity, sexuality and experience.**

methodological and political consequences derive from this conceptualization.

To take Bakhtin (1981) seriously on his assertion about the shaping force of the immediate situation of the dialogue³, means to consider the conversations as objects of research themselves and therefore as sensitive to analysis and interpretation, for they are the whole basis upon which the process of research stands.

In these terms, I consider myself a situated subject (Rosaldo 1991) in the sense that any researcher has a particular point of view that will determine his/her interaction with the field and the kind of knowledge he/she constructs. Age, race, gender, class, and religious and educational backgrounds make a difference to the kind of information produced during field work, and to the kind of bond established with the participants. This research is thus considered the product of a relationship between the participants and the researcher, which has to be analyzed in order to point out its situatedness.

Such a position goes against the ideology of objectivism, neutrality and universalism in social research, for such claims are based on the conception of a 'culturally invisible' researcher (Rosaldo 1991) who would be a **tabula rasa** that starts off from no point of view at all. By failing to discuss the political and historical situatedness of the researcher, science constructs a universalizing gaze that intends to describe reality as it is. Sampson (1993) calls this Western habit 'the male gaze' because it comes from dominant groups' position, that is, from the view of white, middle-class American males:

...we have learned to adopt one particular standpoint or gaze in looking upon the world, and to treat this standpoint as though it represented the way things actually are. In this subtle manner, other ways of experiencing are silenced. The male gaze is presented as though it were neutral and

³ See chapter I, 4.3. **Dialogue and meaning.**

universal, a standard by which all seeing, knowing and experiencing are in fact constituted. The process has become so ingrained in most of us that we are no longer even aware of the particularity of the standpoint we are employing. It is not even experienced as a standpoint at all; it appears to us ... as a God's-eye view from Nowhere (Sampson 1993:8).

So, for me it is relevant to discuss the conditions that gave rise to the design of this research and their implications for the kind of knowledge it would produce.

1.1. The construction of the object of study: biography and method.

The object of study was constructed as a result of the interaction of different spheres of interest. Firstly, on a personal level, since I myself am immersed in the cultural changes that I have mentioned above, the idea of understanding the subjective processes that take place in the transformation of sexual meanings was very appealing to me. My struggle to come to terms with my own Catholic upbringing, in which the notion of female sexual desire and pleasure is regarded, at the very least, as inappropriate, pushed me toward trying to comprehend the way in which such meanings are constructed and assimilated, or resisted, by different subjects. Needless to say, my own bias toward modern, autonomous subjectivity, especially for women, is the platform of such position.

A definite influence in my work was my professional perspective as a social psychologist trained at the **Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco** (in Mexico City), a public university that employed many activists that participated in the students movement of 1968, as well as many Argentinean and Chilean refugees (mostly marxist psychoanalysts) who gave this University a profound leftist tradition. The intention of this institution has been to train social and educational psychologists that would be aware of the social dimension

of subjectivity and that would respond to the social problems that were prevalent in Mexican society then. The curricula were explicitly critical of clinical approaches because it considered them a middle-class solution that could not account nor respond to the larger social reality of Mexico. Very much influenced by such trend of thought, when I designed this project, sexuality offered me a particularly rich gateway to study the complex relationship between the individual and society, because I think that it is within sexuality where personal history interacts most intimately with the values of a particular society.

In terms of the method, I was deeply influenced by the didactic model of the University, because it included a reflective process in which I was always encouraged to apply theoretical notions to my own personal life, so that I would always take myself as the object of my own observation, before I could think about and observe others. Also, I was trained to reflect upon the effects of fieldwork upon my own subjectivity, as well as to be aware of the assumptions with which I approached it.

Part of the training at the University was also students' participation in a number of reflection groups based on the theory of **grupos operativos**⁴ developed by Latin American social psychologists and psychiatrists (Pichón-Rivière 1981, Bauleo 1979a, 1979b). This theory and technique considers that learning is a complex social process that includes not only information, but also emotion, in order to produce a certain knowledge that will be embodied and assimilated, rather than rationally, at the level of experience (Bauleo 1974). These groups were implemented as workshops in almost every term, and they relied on the capability of students to reflect upon their own experience within certain social and political conditions. They provided me with a safe environment to risk reflecting about my own identity in terms of

⁴ This notion could be translated as 'operational groups'.

sexuality and gender, as well as about my political position before the Mexican reality of inequality and poverty.

These experiences resulted in a profound questioning and change of my own personal identity that implied a great struggle between my middle-class, Catholic background, and the libertarian social and psychological theories and methods that I was studying. It is this process of transformation, both its pains and its joys, that I resort to when talking to individuals about their own experience of gender and sexuality.

A final personal determinant in the project stems from my practice as a family therapist, which strengthened this reflective stance. In 1990 I participated in a workshop at the Ackerman Institute for Family Therapy in New York in which the works of the narrative approach to therapy were taught and discussed. Besides reading certain materials, we were encouraged to work with couples and families using a one-way mirror and to be criticized by our colleagues after every session.

It was White and Epston's (1990) application of Foucault's work, along with certain post-modern anthropological approaches, that deeply influenced my standpoint and experience before my own and others' subjectivity. In this workshop I discovered a practical way in which politics could be linked to individual experience, and subjectivity was considered social, thus finding an answer to a long period of searching for an approach that could allow me to consider the individual as political, but also to have practical tools to act upon others' uneasiness and suffering without being considered the expert, nor treating them according to any theory of pathology.

Through a brief period of clinical work, and based upon my observation of the relationship between gender and individuals' constructions about their own sexuality, I concluded that the study of first sexual intercourse could reveal a great deal about the nature of male-female

relationships. My assumption was that dominant cultural stereotypes of what it means to be a woman or a man could be expressed in this interaction. For instance, in my clinical practice, boys often expressed a vague social pressure to start their sexual activity quite early, while girls stated the contrary; their obligation to remain virgins until marriage. Gender issues related to virginity were crucial to their sexual initiation. Their personal experience of such norms varied, but they often reflected a strong sense of resistance, because these meanings could not include many aspects of their subjective experience.

1.2. Sexuality as a research problem: for whom?

In the previous section I have described the influences that shaped my personal thought about sexuality and gender, but they did not exist outside certain social conditions that also marked the construction of the object of this research.

In terms of the broader political circumstances that surrounded the birth of this project, knowledge regarding sexuality and reproduction had been constructed within the context of new scientific developments and challenges posed by population and health problems from a global perspective. The AIDS epidemic has provoked a worldwide surge in research on sexuality, and such efforts have received considerable support from funding agencies that had traditionally focussed upon demographic research that intended to inform population growth control policies.

Much of the research done in this area had apparently failed in fully explaining the complexity of the elements that intervene in sexual and reproductive decision-making among different cultural groups. New, more in-depth research was considered necessary in order to explain the distance between information and actual prevention behaviours. My interest was to look precisely at the subjective processes that take part in the

individual-social construction of sexuality and gender within the diversity of Mexico, although not necessarily always in relation to reproductive decision making. But the subject that I chose in some way matched the institutional interests that I have mentioned.

At the same time, long-standing efforts by global and local feminist organizations to incorporate their agenda into mainstream social research had begun to bear fruit. Today the interests of institutional and Government agencies around fertility and population fields match those of large segments of the feminist movements. Such a coincidence bears, apparently, on the legitimization of the notion of gender. This seems to be based upon the recognition of the failure of a great number of campaigns of contraception and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, that neglected the gendered aspects of such practices. After three decades of women's studies in the USA and the UK, this area has finally been considered crucial by funding agencies, and also allowed a generation of educated women to occupy power positions in international organizations such as USAID (United States Agency for International Development), UNFPA (United Nations Fund for Population Activities), PAHO (Panamerican Health Organization) or WHO (World Health Organization). In this context, both feminist groups and Government agencies have spoken of the need to know in detail different sexual cultures, which is what this project intended to do from the beginning.

This information could also serve as background for feminist groups in their present struggle to get Governments to provide comprehensive and effective sexual and reproductive health services as well as respect for sexual and reproductive rights, through demanding the enabling conditions for the exercise of free choice of women and/or couples. These actions required research on subjective and relational processes looked at through microanalysis.

Women's status was also a crucial issue for these organizations in terms of the development of Third World countries, not only in relation to Government's concerns with decreasing fertility, but also because of its impact upon the economy, that is shifting from agricultural to urban and service societies. The political dilemma for me was how not to serve developed countries' concerns about the fast reproduction of those 'others' -constituted by poor and Indian cultures-, by providing the necessary information for their agencies to intervene in individuals' lives, but to seize the opportunity to respond to the genuine social need of understanding the subjective processes that construct gender inequality and unwanted reproduction, as well as health risks. It seemed to me that, although the objectives were not the same, the political situation could allow me to look at these issues from individuals' point of view, rather than as a way of facilitating the imposition of a certain population policy.

Mexican society had not been alien to the political turmoil caused by AIDS and the emergence of the concept of reproductive health, which was finally expressed in the Mexican Government's commitment to the Cairo and Beijing Platforms for Action. Feminist movements, sexual and reproductive rights advocates and academics had been working and lobbying in order to get the Government to include women's issues in health and population programmes⁵. But the ways in which the Government has carried out this task are highly questionable, because it is incorporating the discourse of reproductive health without really broadening its definition: it is simply a new synonym for family planning. I thought that this research could collaborate in opening up such concept by looking at sexuality not only in its relation to reproduction.

⁵ See chapter I, 4.4. *Contemporary Mexico*, especially iv) *Social actors: feminism, gay and lesbian movements and right-wing groups*.

This was the scientific and political situation that allowed the cultural aspects of sexuality to become a legitimate subject of study for certain Mexican political and scientific communities, and that made it possible for me to get financial support from an international institution⁶ in order to do the field work and the first phases of analysis as well as a student grant for the writing-up of the thesis⁷. The first funding agency wanted the study to have certain characteristics, which can be summarized as follows:

- To study the subjective and social dimensions of sexual practices within particular contexts.
- To conduct in-depth studies of several social groups that could illustrate different aspects of Mexican cultural diversity, with a special focus on differences in the meanings attached to sexuality and reproduction.
- To work within a multi-disciplinary group in which different professional approaches would shed light on the problem.
- To use a qualitative methodology in which in-depth interviews would serve as the main source of information.
- To limit the study period to two years.

The fieldwork was developed within these broad parameters, in such a way that the particular questions I wished to study could be addressed. The agency's goal was to produce a series of comprehensive, qualitative studies on the cultural aspects of sexual practice. Such studies were to address certain problems related to the unmet need of family planning programmes, and to understand the reasons why so many Mexican women do not use contraception, even though they do not want any more

⁶ The fieldwork of this research was supported by the Regional Program of Gender, Family and Reproductive Health, from the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean of The Population Council, and by the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco, during 1993-1994.

⁷ The Mellon Foundation, through the Center on Population, Gender and Social Inequality of the University of Maryland.

children. They also intended to overcome the limitations of quantitative studies that could not account fully for the ways in which many variables, such as family or couple relationships, affect the use of contraception⁸. I used this proposal in order to look at my own research interests and to develop my method of research, which I did not link directly to family planning or prevention behaviours.

Even though my research interests coincided broadly with the agency's, I did have some concerns about how the study results could be used to justify interventions that could not take into account the cultural characteristics of the communities where the research was based. Policy-makers or other organizations could design programmes and services based on these findings, without consulting the persons and communities involved in the study, and therefore perhaps imposing goals, values and practices alien to their own needs and culture. Such a risk is never avoidable. Nevertheless, to try to prevent it, I strongly recommended that no interventions should be based on such information without the participation of the communities, so that they would be useful mainly to them, more than to other institutions interested in regulating sexual behaviour. Obviously, this is now beyond my control.

Other political issues were present during the design of the project, namely the status of the participants. Although my motivation included a desire to collaborate in improving their living conditions, they themselves did not demand nor desire this research project. Maybe this is one of the reasons why the project was designed in terms of the socially dominant model of sexuality: the heterosexual reproductive relationship. A study based on the communities' demands might have focused, for instance, on what the participants

⁸ Dr. Kathryn Tolbert, Director of the Regional Program of Gender, Family and Reproductive Health, of The Population Council. Personal communication.

considered the most significant sexual experience in their lives, regardless of their kind of sexual initiation or partner. My choice of emphasis on dominant sexual norms consequently reveals that I myself participated in such prescriptions and that they permeated the design of the research.

1.3. Power relationships during fieldwork: conversations and contestation.

As said before, this research intends to analyze, in a practical manner, the relationship between the researcher's standpoint and that of the participants', identifying the voices we quoted regarding sexuality and virginity which, in turn, reflected part of the world views of both the speakers. This results in acknowledging participants as social analysts who sometimes challenged and contested the researcher's position.

Which were the metaphors or definitions that I favored within the dialogues? Was I pushing toward a particular conception of gender? or of eroticism? What were the participants' answers to such suggestions? What concepts of self, sexuality and gender were meeting in dialogue? Within this power relationship, when did I intend to impose my vision and when did participants accept or resist my definitions? What dominant discourses were quoted by the speakers and when did alternative positions appear? On whose part?

In order to answer these questions, it was necessary to analyze complete conversations, including the researcher's interventions, because the dialogues could only be understood and interpreted as actual interaction. I intentionally call the meetings 'conversations' because they take into account that there is a dialogue between the participant and the researcher. The concept of interview does not apply to this research, for it presupposes an object-subject relationship in which the first one is to be studied, while the second one studies.

It also denies the researcher's power, because he/she is to pose the questions and not to be questioned, whether by the participants or by the process of analysis itself.

When I designed and carried out these conversations I was not familiar with feminist research methods (Roberts 1981) that had already expressed the importance, not only of recognizing, but of actively interacting with participants and validating their subjective experience as part of the research process itself. Feminist researchers had already questioned the disembodied approach of dominant methods of social research and regarded them as a masculine stance before knowledge that neglected other forms of knowledge related to personal and embodied viewpoints. Now, a posteriori, I see that there is great accordance between my conception of the fieldwork and that of feminist researchers (Oakley 1981). However, I disagree with them in that such approach to interviews is 'feminine', because from that it could be easily concluded that emotion, intuition and commitment are 'female'. In any case, these human capabilities have been socially constructed as feminine, and they have to be deconstructed as such. To reinforce these assets as a 'feminine' method is precisely to accept that classification as if it were real.

One last word about the conversations and my situatedness. Being a divorced woman, born and raised in middle class neighbourhoods and private Catholic schools in Mexico City, as well as having a Spanish background, gave my intervention in the field certain characteristics. For example, it seemed to help women to tell me their story, for they often appealed to our gender as grounds for understanding. However, class and racial difference sometimes produced some apprehension. For men, it seemed that my prestige as a member of a public university was more important than my gender. With them it seemed that my femaleness disappeared in favour of a neutral character that was granted to me from science. This image seemed to help them tell their story

because they did not consider me the same kind of woman as their mothers, sisters or wives, to whom they probably would not tell them.

As for my academic background, being a social psychologist and a family therapist gave my interventions a special character as well. Rather than just asking the participants for their views on virginity and sexual initiation, I established conversations in which I actively intervened reinforcing utterances of what I considered to be resistance against sexual mores and norms. Because of my clinical training, I often sensed diverse degrees of uneasiness or straight disagreement against what participants regarded as dominant discourses of sexuality, which constrained and limited their choice and their definition of experience. My political position against gender roles and premisses urged me to support any expression of what I considered a personal desire or non-conformity opposed to dominant discourses. This produced particular conversations, which frequently became accounts of intimate experiences that participants needed to tell about, looking for alternative meanings to them. It is my wish that the conversations served, at least a little, for this purpose.

Of course this active position on my part might be taken as an imposition upon the participant, because my own background pushes me toward the modern ethics of individual choice, so distant from the material conditions of the individuals I worked with. I thought that if this was so, the analysis would show it through the participants' responses. In the end, it showed that they sometimes directly rejected my definitions and suggestions, while at other times they entertained them and came up with new meanings for their experience⁹.

⁹ These interactions can be seen in Part Two: **Dialogues on sexuality, virginity and sexual initiation.**

2. The reasons for the qualitative method.

Given the above considerations as the political and personal background of this research, I will now discuss its main epistemological and methodological characteristics. Since it is focussed upon the social subjective processes linked to the construction of meaning, the most coherent procedure to look at this problem was the qualitative method. Even though this approach is not monolithic nor defines a rigid set of rules regarding procedures, there are general principles that guide it in terms of its conception of society and of knowledge. First of all, qualitative inquiry considers that reality is socially constructed and therefore is not independent of the individuals that construct it. While quantitative methods focus on 'objective' and external phenomena, qualitative methods intend to do 'interpretive' studies of individuals' subjectivity and of the products of their interaction. The main object of this perspective is the meaning that they ascribe to reality and how it affects their construction of themselves and their behaviour (Castro 1996).

Several epistemological considerations derive from such a position. First, qualitative methods consider individuals as interpretive actors of reality (Alexander 1992), who in turn have been constituted by social processes. By focusing on the subjective dimension of individuals, it grants them a certain degree of freedom and thus questions total macrosocial determination. Social order is partly conceived as the result of these subjective interactions and thus, instead of studying 'social laws', this method looks at 'contingencies' (Castro 1996). Consequently, its goal is to understand social and subjective processes, rather than to explain them.

In order to do this, studies must be done at a microsocial level, so that 'the interpretive particularities of social processes can be captured'

(Castro 1996:65*). Therefore, there can be no general social theory of contingencies from which knowledge is to be deduced but, rather, a multiplicity of concrete singularities from which to induce comprehension.

In order to produce interpretive knowledge, concepts must be flexible enough as to encompass the possible diversity of meanings that individuals ascribe to their experience. These are considered possible directions of inquiry rather than precise descriptions of reality. In accordance with such definitions, the knowledge produced by qualitative methods is descriptive, analytic and exploratory.

In terms of the kind of information that is gathered by these methods, whether the instruments are participant observation or interviews, the researcher must produce written texts that are considered to record his/her interactions with the individuals involved in the research. I do not see these records, however, as objects of reality, but as interpretations made by myself, as guided by a certain theoretical and political background. Such observations are poured into texts that constitute the main material upon which the qualitative analysis is done. As Mishler (1986) reminds:

...investigators must keep in mind that speech is the intended object of study. At each stage of analysis and interpretation they must be wary of taking their own transcripts as **the** reality (Mishler 1986:48).

Thus, these texts are the result of a process of transformation of the information gathered during fieldwork. First of all, as said above, the situation of the interview or conversation affects the kind of information that individuals offer. Secondly, the mere fact of tape-recording the conversation has a double effect, because although it fixes what is said and makes certain analysis possible, it also loses important information like gestures, movements and facial expressions. Next, the transcription of the conversations is another transformation, because it includes some

features of speech but excludes others, like intonation, volume, tone, etc. (Mishler 1986). Thus, texts must be read as if they represented talk and they themselves become, rather than actual oral discourse, the object of analysis.

Codification is another transformation of field material, because it constitutes a preliminary classification of findings in order to include them in a code or category that makes sense within the researcher's theoretical approach to the problem. Finally, interpretation transforms the actual interaction by converting codes into meanings, that is, into 'theoretical explanations that are consistent with what was said' (Castro 1996:73*). Therefore, there is a methodological paradox in qualitative methodology because, in order to approach the information gathered by fieldwork in a systematic manner, the researcher needs to distance him/herself from it, through the successive transformation of the original interaction into analyzable material.

The process through which these transformations took place in this research will be described next.

3. The process of research

3.1. The sites

In chapter I¹⁰ I have discussed the cultural complexity of Mexican modern culture, as well as the contents of several social discourses that have intended to be, and in some cases were, dominant during certain historical periods. The coexistence of these different configurations in present times called, in the case of this research, for the recognition of such diversity and thus for the selection of communities that could serve as illustrations of the hybridity of constructions of

¹⁰ **The hybrid construction of sexuality in Mexico.**

sexuality. Precisely because modernization and modernity in Mexico is not homogeneous nor linear, I decided to do field work in three communities: an urban neighbourhood in Mexico City, a rural **mestizo** village in the state of Guanajuato and an indigenous town of Oaxaca, because they could illustrate different forms of the process of hybridization of sexual culture.

Within these examples are elements that could speak about the importance of diverse discourses on sexuality for the individuals and the communities involved, and which are closely related to the effects of structural processes like national and international migration, formal education and integration to the national and international markets¹¹.

3.2. The fieldwork: a winding road

In the beginning, I visited the three communities in order to investigate the conditions and possibilities of working there, until relationships were established both with the people at the non-government organizations that introduced me to the communities, and with the main contacts within each of them. In Oaxaca I was introduced to the community by a family of weavers that were in connection to a local non-government organization. After two visits to the town, they became a kind of 'headquarters' of this research and gave me a lot of support. It was the eldest son of this family, who was 30 and was frequently scolded by his mother because he was not married yet, who introduced me to most of the men in the community. In Guanajuato I started to do the conversations immediately because the non-government organization that I had contacted were already working on reproductive health issues within the communities that I was to visit. Finally, I went to a secondary school in

¹¹ For a general description of the communities see Part Two: 1. **The communities.**

Mexico City several times before I started to do the conversations in order for the young people to get to know me and the purpose of my work.

In order to decide the kind of arrangement more favorable for the expression of personal experience, I conducted group, couple and individual meetings in all of the settings. I initially met one boy and one girl in Mexico City with the only purpose that they talked about anything they considered important regarding first sexual intercourse. Their main concern was the risk of pregnancy, especially for the girl. From these conversations I outlined what seemed to be some of the relevant issues and topics that needed to be addressed during future conversations. This guideline was modified in accordance to the ongoing emergence of data and to the simultaneous process of coding and analysis¹².

Next, I talked jointly to a couple in Oaxaca, but the kind of information that emerged was not suitable, because they did not share their experiences with me, but rather reported only official norms and rules that they supposed I expected to hear. The husband talked during the whole meeting, while the wife only nodded her approval to all he said, thus preventing her adding to or disagreeing with the story he was telling. Although this mere fact could be illustrative of the kind of gender relationship that this couple had, at least in terms of who is to tell the official story to outsiders, it could not show their resistances against dominant discourses, in contrast to the people to whom I talked individually.

Also, in order to have a frame of reference for individual discourse, I had a meeting with one group in each of the communities. In Oaxaca and Guanajuato the groups were separated by sex, because this was the usual arrangement for the organizations' activities. None of these groups offered enough information to be analyzed. In the group of young girls in Oaxaca one of the mothers

¹² See Appendix B.

attended without being asked to, and I could not ask her to leave because it would have caused a serious offense. The girls were very shy and hardly spoke about their experiences. Rather, they insisted on moral values and behavioral norms that they considered would be approved by the mother. In any case, none of these girls spoke of having had intercourse, nor about what they expected from it. In another women's group in Oaxaca, some of the women were elders to others, so that younger ones did not speak their minds.

The women's groups in Guanajuato did not talk about their experiences either, they mostly giggled and looked at each other without engaging in a conversation with me. Since the meeting was held in a midwife's house, there were several young mothers with their children, but they refused to tell their stories and stayed quiet. The midwife offered stories about some women in the community, but none of the participants agreed to relate them to me.

Among the group of male construction workers in Guanajuato, the boss boasted about his affairs and his ability to seduce women into intercourse, so that others would follow such a show-off or laughed at a less skilled fellow. This context did not allow for many of the members of the group to tell their stories, nor to ask any questions.

At the school in Mexico City boys and girls were usually together, and so they participated jointly in the talk. I talked to them about AIDS prevention and sexual intercourse, in terms of young people's experiences, expectations and fears¹³. But the group seemed uninterested and distracted by their own activities and conversations.

In short, group interviews did not offer the kind of information that I was looking for, that is, stories

¹³ This information was taken from previous research (see Rodríguez, Amuchástegui, Rivas and Bronfman 1995).

about first sexual experience, and so I decided to carry out individual conversations. That, for me, was evidence enough to say that this subject is considered a private matter and that it is not to be publicly spoken about. It became clear that the kind of stories about experience of first sexual intercourse would not be expressed in this context, because most of the participants did not want to share them with the groups. Also, these conversations would only reflect part of the situation because they only described general behaviours or dominant norms - which, by the way, were different for men and women-, but did not express the richness of individual subjective experiences regarding intercourse.

Besides getting information, I conducted these group meetings in order to introduce the research topic, and myself and to ask for voluntary participation. I described my research by saying that I was studying the ways in which young couples were formed in different parts of the country, and that their experience and knowledge about the issue would be very useful for me. Next, I introduced myself as a psychologist from a public university in Mexico City and offered my skills in order to talk to them about their concerns and questions regarding sexuality.

Thus, this kind of introduction allowed for a self-selection of many participants and for the conversations to be carried out on the basis of their questions regarding sexuality, gender and relationship issues. Eleven individuals (six women and five men) approached me after this invitation. However, not all participants belonged to an NGO, and in order to gather the total of conversations I intended for analysis, I used a snowball method, by which one participant would introduce me to another and so on. Each of them was then individually invited to participate, by introducing the research and myself as described above. This is how another five women and seven men agreed to talk to me.

At first, I had decided to have conversations with

three girls and three boys individually per community, adding to a total of 18. However, in light of the first data and coding, I talked to nine more participants. In total, there were 27 individual conversations, of which four were not analyzed. They did not prove useful because of the paucity of information within them, and since participants responded to my questions with monosyllables or avoided answering altogether.

Among these was the case of a young man from Oaxaca who was mentally retarded and did not tell any story about his first intercourse, nor did he express any expectations about it. Another one was a young married woman that giggled all through the conversation and refused to tell me about her first sexual experience. She approached me because she was worried about what she considered to be side effects of her recent sterilization. I recommended her to consult a physician. The other two were conversations that a male colleague had carried out. One of the participants exceeded the age for the study (he was 33) and the other one did not respond to the request to tell his story about intercourse.

Thus, the quality of the information offered by the remaining conversations was evaluated through the density of the metaphors, stories and descriptions of the experience of first intercourse. Twelve conversations with men and eleven with women were finally chosen for analysis and interpretation. Thus the final number of cases to be analyzed (23) was decided after the conversations had taken place and had been transcribed and read carefully¹⁴.

Participants' agreed to be part of the research on a voluntary basis, and I guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, by erasing their names and any data that could identify them from my transcriptions and notes. In

¹⁴ A brief description of biographical and sociodemographic data on the participants can be found in Part Two, 2. **The participants** and in Appendix A.

the conversations I started by asking what could I do for them, within my knowledge and possibilities. Questions ranged from a 15 year old boy that was concerned whether or not early sexual initiation -at his age- would stop physical growth, to medical consultations about stomach symptoms and sexually transmitted diseases.

Some of the participants, however, did not formulate any particular question, but simply wanted to participate in the conversation and tell part of their life stories. Frequently during the conversations other issues would arise, most often about difficulties in sexual or family relationships. For instance, soon into the conversation, one of the male participants started to cry about the loss of his older sister, who left the town to go to the city and who was abused by her husband. This sister was, also, the first person with whom he had sexual intercourse. My training as a family therapist allowed me to try to help him construct a different meaning from self-blame, in order for him to forgive himself and grieve his loss at the same time. Another example of the need for explicit intervention was the concern of a mother about the fact that her 4 year old son played with dolls and that everyone at school made fun of him saying that he was a **maricon** (a faggot).

However, other demands were not within my possibilities to address, like medical consultations, and I made sure that I offered alternatives to both physical and psychological concerns. In the case of the young man described above, he was referred to a psychologist who could talk to him almost free of charge.

Obviously, this situation was grounded upon the fact that it was inevitable for me to be put in a position of power because of my status as a symbol of specialized knowledge. I tried to refuse the power that was given to me and avoided recommending, diagnosing or teaching anything to the participants. Rather, I tried to work such problems by conversing with them and posing questions that would bring forth their own perspective

and their own resources. But it is obvious that I offered solutions that might have been inappropriate for them, since I relied so heavily on science and modern medicine.

In some cases, however, it was impossible not to intervene in a more prescriptive manner. Such was the case of concrete questions about sexual or reproductive functions based upon a specific problem that could easily be addressed with information. For example, Saúl, a young man from the rural community of Guanajuato expressed great anger over the fact that his young bride had not become pregnant in the two months following their wedding. The way in which he was blaming her seemed to foreshadow a violent incident in the near future:

SAUL: Here I am, you know?, two months married, practically two-and-a-half months, my marriage is very recent... and my wife keeps telling me 'no, I don't feel any symptoms of pregnancy' and I say 'Listen! I'm working very hard... I can feel myself wasting away but... you're still empty', so to speak, 'and you're throwing away what I... can't get very easily'... Is it true what they say... that a man gives part of his life up in order to give life?

RESEARCHER: It is too early for you to be worried about your wife not being pregnant, too early. You have to keep in mind that you only have a few chances each month to get her pregnant. You don't have it every single day.

S: Not every day?

R: No, there is only a small period every month. Keep in mind that you've had only two of them up to now.

S: In two months? And what if in those two months I've had ten ejaculations... or more than ten?

R: Well, if they didn't happen on the fertile days...

S: And what if I'm running out of life every time I give it?

R: Don't worry, you're not going to run out of that¹⁵.

(Saúl: 1).

In this excerpt, the piece of information given to Saúl about the ovulation process might have offered him an alternative meaning to the absence of pregnancy:

¹⁵ Since the conversations were carried out in Spanish, I offer here my own translation of the transcriptions. The original Spanish versions of these excerpts can be found in Appendix C, by their numbers in the main text.

instead of being the bride's fault -as if she could consciously control it- it could be a normal physiological process for the time being.

It is very important to be aware of the effect that research on sexuality can have on participants, especially when the researcher employs techniques that invite people to relate personal experiences and describe memories, feelings and events that are subjectively relevant to them. In many instances, these techniques can lead individuals to spontaneously articulate questions generated by frustration, pain or need of information. In this context, a misinterpretation of neutrality as distance can have negative consequences. More likely than not, research in this situation invades more or less directly the daily life and private sphere of the participants. Consequently, it is essential that researchers acquire basic skills to respond to the needs that the research relationship generates.

The fact that I did not belong to the communities, nor that I would stay there after fieldwork, seemed to facilitate more trust, since this circumstance guaranteed confidentiality. In fact it seemed that, for some of them, the conversation was an opportunity to discuss and express some issues about sexuality without fear of judgment or indiscretion. Some of the participants seemed quite pleased merely to have an opportunity to tell their story, experiences and concerns to an outsider, as the expression 'I've never told this to anyone before' showed. This can be interpreted, on the one hand, as evidence of the fundamental need to tell one's story and thereby to try to find new meanings for one's experience and, on the other, as an expression of the type of bond that some of the participants developed with me. I hope that this whole dynamic was a positive experience for the participants as much as it was for me.

In terms of their characteristics, I decided at first that participants should be between 15 and 19 year-old, both girls and boys, according to statistics of the

average age of first intercourse among young people in Mexico¹⁶. However, soon enough into field work, it was evident that the age span had to be extended to 30 year-old participants, since older people showed a greater willingness to talk to me and because many of the youngest had not had intercourse. A difficulty to tell their story was also observed in terms of participants' couple status: those who were married or within a union were more open than those that were still single and living with their parents.

Since the subject of study was the construction of meaning of virginity and sexual initiation, expectations could be as relevant as the experience itself and, therefore, it was important to have both virgin (6) and non-virgin participants (17).

I also talked to some people that could offer supplementary information about the topic. In Oaxaca I talked to a private and a Government doctor, to the town's midwife, to the priest and to one of the teachers at the secondary school. The traditional ritual authority refused to talk to me about customs of marriage and betrothal. In Guanajuato the priest did not make himself available to me, but I talked to the doctor at the Government's clinic, to a woman health promoter and to some of the teachers at the secondary school. In Mexico City I talked to the priest, to the doctor at the local clinic, and to the teacher who was in charge of youth programmes.

Last, whenever possible, because some of the participants had moved or traveled after the analysis was completed, I went back to the field to talk to them about

¹⁶ The average age for initiation differs for girls and boys. While girls start around 17, boys have their first coitus by the age of 15.8 (OPS/OMS 1988:27). Girls' first sexual intercourse happens more often within the first conjugal relationship. Since there has been a delay in the age of first union for women, the age of first intercourse has increased as well. The proportion of women that had their first intercourse before 16 decreased from 20.2% in the generation of 1940-1949, to 10.9% in the generation of women born between 1965-1969. In rural areas, the fraction of women whose first intercourse happened before 16 is double than in urban areas, and almost five times more frequent among women without education than among those that have concluded elementary school (CONAPO 1996:13).

the findings of my work, concealing any information that could identify them before their peers, and discussing the differences that I had found in the other communities.

The subject of this study -sexuality- affected me in personal significant ways, leading to a reexamination of my identity, and especially of my sexual subjectivity. Through each stage of the research process, from conceptualization to analysis, my own subjectivity interacted with the participants' and with the data encountered. Whether I acknowledged it openly or not, I tended to identify with the participants, to judge them or to be surprised by their responses. In this interplay of researcher-subject-data, the various dominant and subjugated models of sexual identity mix and struggle, and the study's results bear a sub-textual record of that conflict. By stating and describing such tensions as part of the conditions in which the data were produced, this study can be placed within the context of its limitations.

The first clash between my expectations as a researcher and the fieldwork occurred when I observed the great degree to which rural communities, and specially the indigenous one, exerted vigilance over women's sexual activity. It seemed to me that women's very freedom of movement was being governed by their neighbours and relatives. My romantic vision of native peoples was shattered by this graphic evidence of how power was exercised in daily community life. In the face of this evidence I could not maintain a view of them as mere victims of a larger system to which they were only subjected. It was then very clear to me how power is exercised within microsocial spaces.

In contrast, it was a pleasant surprise to discover a number of personal stories and practices that defied what I considered to be constraining gender prescriptions. Finding sexual norms was easy; the challenge lay in detecting and analyzing the

participants' resistance to them. I observed how young indigenous women, for instance, would ingeniously and effectively use their virginity as a tool to secure a husband and a viable future. The experience helped me to see individuals in all their political complexity, and to question the dominant story about their submissiveness and obedience.

3.3. The process of invitation of participants.

The selection of participants for this research followed both theoretical and practical considerations. In terms of its methodological orientation, this research shares some of the features of what is called an 'instrumental case [or set of cases] study' (Stake 1994:237) in the following sense:

In what we may call 'instrumental case study', a particular case is examined to provide insight on an issue or refinement of theory. The case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else. (Stake 1994:237).

In this study, the theoretical issue that I wanted to explore was the relationship between subjectivity, sexuality and experience, in terms of the construction of meaning that individuals offered using social discourses to describe their first intercourse within a context of cultural hybridity. Thus, the selection of the communities depended on their potential to illustrate such processes. Also, such research object -subjectivity- required precisely that singularity and particularity be expressed, so that analysis could bring forth the process through which participants constructed meaning.

Since this interest in theory was important, several epistemological and theoretical issues about the complex nature of the object of study supported the choice of an inductive approach to the selection of participants, because the research was considered an ongoing process in which decisions had to be made according to the

information that was being gathered. I agree with Janesick (1994) in that:

The qualitative researcher uses inductive analysis, which means the categories, themes and patterns come from the data. The categories that emerge from field notes, documents and interviews are not imposed prior to data collection... Staying close to the data is the most powerful means of telling the story (Janesick 1994:215).

The final number of conversations should allow for such an inductive and interpretative analysis¹⁷. So, in order to gather this number of participants, I resorted to what Honigmann (1982) calls an 'opportunistic sample', which is:

...the familiar process by which fieldworkers find many of the people who provide them with ethnographic information. Such sampling follows no strict, logical plan. The perimeters of the sampled universe are poorly drawn and the procedure itself is situationally variable, as well as being idiosyncratically influenced by the personal qualities of the particular ethnographer, that it becomes well-nigh impossible for another person to replicate (Honigmann 1982:81).

This procedure has been questioned in terms of its validity, reliability and generalizability by those perspectives closer to positivistic social science, but my main argument against such criticisms is that the object of this qualitative study is different to that of traditional approaches to sexuality and cannot be evaluated under the same paradigm. This research looks at the experience of individuals, rather than at their behaviours, attitudes or opinions, and such a complex category makes certain traditional research techniques - like surveys, semi-directed and one-way interviews, and analytical tools inspired in statistical criteria - irrelevant to this study. Experience is only understandable through empathy and through analogical exercises conducted by the researcher, where he/she can draw from his/her own experience in order to try to

¹⁷ See 5. Analysis method: a process of deconstruction, below in this same chapter.

comprehend the participants' accounts. Such information can only be attained through unconventional methods of fieldwork that allow for a close relationship and trust between participants and researcher. I agree with Honigmann (1982), however, in that the deeper the probing is, the more it can illustrate the culture of the participants:

...a common culture is reflected in practically every person, event and artefact belonging to a common system. In a community, nearly every source of data an ethnographer consults -each informant, subject, event and artefact- in some degree or in some way reveals consistencies with many other sources he consults (Honigmann 1982:83)

Along with this idea of the singular as reflecting the general, I also share what postmodern ethnographers argue, in terms that:

...no individual or case is ever just an individual or a case. He or she must be studied as a single instance of more universal social experiences and social processes... Thus to study the particular is to study the general. For this reason, any case will necessarily bear the traces of the universal; consequently, [in this kind of research] there is less interest in the traditional positivist and post-positivist concerns with negative cases, generalizations, and case selection. The researcher assumes that readers will be able... to generalize subjectively from the case in question to their own personal experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:202).

If the most particular was not capable of illustrating the universal, literature would have neither significance nor any effect on knowledge and yet, it is one of its richest sources. Analogically, this research's method appeals strongly to lived experience as a source of knowledge that can be shared by individuals of different cultural backgrounds in their negotiation of meaning and construction of knowledge.

4. The construction of data

Fortunately, researchers rarely find what they were looking for. Fieldwork forces them to rethink and redefine the initial research questions and frameworks

for interpretation. In my case, at first I was looking for descriptive data on the subject and, although I had in mind a constructionist view of sexuality and a comprehension of subjectivity as a social process, I had not designed precise interpretative procedures.

I started by having conversations with several participants and it soon came up, after the first coding, that the accounts of first sexual intercourse offered consistent images of gender across all sites, all of them related to dominant Catholic prescriptions of femininity and masculinity. I had the suspicion that these constructions were the expression of dominant narratives of gender that excluded broad aspects of participants experience of their bodies, desires and sexual practices. I considered that there should be singular situations, feelings and thoughts that could resist such discourses within their experience. Thus, I set out to look for accounts that included events, actions or wishes that expressed resistance to such constraining narratives. I found White and Epston's (1990) use of the term 'unique outcomes' -taken from Goffman's work (1961)- as very useful to describe the narrative process by which:

...persons are able to identify previously neglected but vital aspects of lived experience -aspects that could not have been predicted from a reading of the dominant story (White and Epston 1990:41).

But, apart from theoretical considerations, what guided me practically in the search of such 'unique outcomes' was both my experience as 'patient' and therapist and my own struggle with constraining Catholic gender prescriptions that I seemed to share, especially with women, so that I often asked questions that invited them to express their uneasiness with such mandates. In these conversations I was particularly interested in detecting and fostering any expression of women's self-authorization for autonomy, and for sexual pleasure and desire, because I considered that these processes could be important for participants. When I did so, it was often the case that women told me stories that often

contradicted such norms, probably because they felt that I would not be judgmental. In case I did not sense such resistance, I tried to understand the subjective experience that the obedience to such prescriptions would call for, without considering them less valid.

In the case of men, I tried to identify with their emotions by resorting to my own experience regarding relationships, norms and desires. It seems to me, **a posteriori**, that I particularly looked for and reinforced expressions of tenderness and emotional attachment, probably because this was my understanding of men's resistance to male gender prescriptions that proscribe such experiences. Again, if they did not express but conformity with dominant norms, I only listened to their stories looking for the kind of emotions and meanings that they would produce.

I must say that my own personal therapeutic process -apart from my life experience- proved to be extremely useful in order to convey to participants a certain understanding of their dilemmas, difficulties and wishes, although I seemed to be a totally different person to them.

These preoccupations made my presence in the field texts undeniable. As I read the transcriptions, I discovered that I had engaged actively in the negotiation and construction of meaning, so that often my own participation seemed to guide the conversations. This clear presence on my part finally led me to conceptualize the conversations as actual dialogues between two individuals that shared the same cultural background only in part.

Literature on the contents of gender images seemed to me a poor tool for interpretation because stereotypes were easy to find and describe. Furthermore, they had been described elsewhere (Lagarde 1990). Rather, it was my interest in the actual functioning of power relationships, of subjectivity within social research, and of gender prescriptions of experience, that marked

the theoretical direction that the interpretation of data would later follow.

Another consideration guided the design of the method. I was looking for the construction of meaning and its effects on experience, and not for accounts of actual sexual behaviour. What I was interested in was the relationship between dominant and subjugated discourses about sexuality and participants' experiences and identities. This is the reason why I did not consider relevant whether or not the stories were truthful, because, in any case, they would all reflect a choice in the way participants constructed their first sexual intercourse.

I initially expected to generate data that would argue for the existence of radical differences and, therefore, of closed, homogeneous cases for each of the communities. However, the analysis showed that such a classification was impossible. Soon into fieldwork I had to discard any conception of rural communities as 'traditional' or closed as opposed to urban cultures. I had to agree with Rosaldo (1991) in that:

The pretension of existence of 'pure' cultures, different to 'ours' intends to strengthen the identity of that who defines them, besides maintaining the illusion that 'our' culture is the model by which the 'others' are compared. If 'they' have the monopoly over authentic culture, 'we' have an implicit one over institutional power. This dark side of the equation shows the urgency to reconstruct social analysis in a way that will consider the interaction between culture and power, and at the same time, to make 'us' more visible culturally speaking (Rosaldo 1991:186*).

Norms related to male and female sexuality, as well as beliefs and values associated with virginity, were similar in all conversations. When I sensed that participants used other people's and institutions' words and popular sayings in order to convey certain meanings, I thought about the presence of dominant and alternative discourses in their construction of experience. This finding, along with my presence in the conversations, led

me to look for a framework that would both account for the dialogic nature of the field texts, as well as for the diversity of discourses that participants used in their accounts. The narrative and interpretive body of social research came to my aid in the search for this understanding, especially after reading works on interpretive anthropology. When I read Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) and Voloshinov's (1929/1973) work I found the main theoretical approach that explained my concerns. Thus, the notion of voices and social languages became key to understand the accounts and stories.

This approach allowed me to see that the differences that I found in the conversations related to the degree to which participants resorted to modern or alternative discourses about sexuality, and that they seemed to be determined more by their experience of migration, formal schooling and exposure to media than by the participants' place of origin.

This finding forced me to change previous explanations about field data, because instead of being able to compare three separate cultural configurations, I had to think of them as taking part in the process of hybridization of Mexican culture that subjected the communities to fluid social forces in which there was a permanent interaction between different discourses.

4.1. Coding

First of all, conversations were tape-recorded and then transcribed, checking that audio and text coincided. Then, following an inductive approach, all texts were read carefully, writing possible codes on the side. These codes came both from the participants' own language and from theoretical concepts already discussed, but they always referred to thematic issues related to the main subject of study: the meanings of virginity and sexual initiation.

For example, the term LOVE was frequently used by

participants as a means of moral evaluation of diverse sexual practices. LOVE could save a woman's soiled reputation and also a man's honor. I coded LOVE every time the term was mentioned in relation to sexual practice and couple formation.

The code SURVEILLANCE came from repetitive accounts of several community agents watching and prescribing certain sexual behaviour for young people. However, participants never used the term SURVEILLANCE. It came from my readings of Foucault and his definitions of power strategies. I called SURVEILLANCE all the utterances that described strategies of vigilance of participants' sexual behaviour on the part of peers, parents or other community members.

For each of the codes I defined very simple parameters, like the ones mentioned above, so that the criteria for each input could be the same every time I used them.

Once all conversations were coded, I found four major thematic axes in which they unfolded. These were:

1. Gender and the construction of subjects of sexuality: the role of sexual knowledge
2. Stories of first sexual intercourse: gender images and premisses.
3. The moral dimension of sexuality: evil, the sacred and rituals of sexual initiation.
4. Technologies of power: surveillance and discipline.

Two of these categories (2 and 4) were finally included in the analysis of the other two, because the images of gender portrayed in participants' stories of first sexual intercourse (2) and the accounts of self-policing related to technologies of power (4) could not be theoretically analyzed without resorting either to the category of social knowledge and gendered subjects (1), or to that of the moral dimension of sexuality (3).

Once these major thematic axes were defined, I looked for nuances and differences within them and

between the different groups. The result of this process was that the accounts could not be grouped merely according to participants' geographical situation because some of them had more similarities with other sites' accounts than with others within the same community. I saw this as the result of what I considered to be the hybridization of discourse of sexuality. Thus, the differences between accounts seemed to be more related to other criteria which were mainly education, migration and exposure to media.

Thus, conversations were classified according to the hybridity of their stories, so that I constructed two theoretical groups:

- migrant and well-educated rural participants, as well as urban women and men.

- rural sedentary and uneducated participants.

Even though all participants showed a hybridity of social languages when describing their sexual experience, urban population resorted more frequently to scientific discourse than rural participants, who seemed to rely more on religious and local moralities. Both urban and rural migrating participants seemed to construct a more autonomous individual identity than rural sedentary participants, who showed a greater disposition to involve their community in the definition of their identity.

In order to respect as much as possible the criteria of dialogism, the conversations were divided into complete dialogues, thus having each conversation divided up in a number of short dialogues manageable for analysis. The criteria for this segmentation were mainly two: when the subject was changed by one of the speakers and when there was a long pause.

A second coding was then carried out, according to the thematic categories mentioned above, in order to have whole dialogues that illustrated these categories and their nuances. Due to this procedure, the management of data was easier because it was already segmented and coded for interpretation according to the main

categories.

Finally, there was a selection of conversation excerpts according to the symbolic density of their metaphors, narratives, rhetoric devices or polyphonies¹⁸ regarding virginity and sexual initiation in order to analyze them according to the method described next. The next step was to conduct a more detailed analysis through the main categories of language that were based upon theoretical considerations.

5. Analysis method: a process of deconstruction.

After coding the conversations I made a series of interpretations and organized them in a first research report that became the main structure for more detailed interpretation (Amuchástegui 1994). As I re-read this report, I discovered that I had concluded many things without explaining them, and that I needed to deconstruct my own thought processes in order for such interpretations to be accounted for. This deconstructive work also included the explicitation of the theoretical, ethical and cultural elements that I used as grounds for interpretation and that were not included in that first version. The result of such auto-analysis is the subject of this section.

Since such process was not part of any conventional method of analysis that I was supposed to follow, I initially looked at other methods that could account for mine. I turned to discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell 1987) at first, but I finally decided not to follow such approach because of its excessive emphasis on the idea that reality is constructed by immediate social interaction, disregarding the importance of history and social structure. Rather, although I recognize the relative creative possibilities of individuals, I still

¹⁸ See 5.2. Dialogue and polyphony: the construction of self and other, in this same chapter.

consider power and society to preexist us, so that the participants' and my own discourse was inscribed and to a certain degree determined by certain cultural and social conditions that could not be denied existence. Also, I was interested in looking at the contents and meanings that the participants and myself offered during the conversations, rather than at forms of speech.

Thus, I decided to look for theoretical referents that could support my own way of interpretation. To them I shall turn next.

5.1. Experience, narrative and metaphor.

Given that I was concerned with the subjective and microsocial processes of construction of meaning, the notion of experience as an emotional, sensation and thought process was useful for this research. As I have said before¹⁹, other person's experience is not something that can be known directly, but it is only through an interpretive process, the process of verbal interaction, that some of this experience can be shared by somebody else. However, it is not the other's experience we can know, but his/her construction of it during the encounter, as he/she tells about it.

This construction is not a one-sided transmission of meanings that the listener passively receives, but it is rather a dialogue that takes the addressee into account. Experience is itself constituted by the interaction, for each account involves the ascription of new meanings to the same set of events, producing shifts in emotion, sensation and thought (Bruner 1986a).

Thus, one of the main assets we have in order to make our experience available to others is the construction of narratives. As stated above²⁰, this is a

¹⁹ See chapter II, 4. **The role of experience in the construction of sexuality.**

²⁰ See chapter II, 4.2. **Social discourses and experience.**

powerful element for the construction of one's identity because through telling one's story experience can be ordered and conveyed to others. Let us remember that these stories are constructed in a close relationship to the dominant narratives of an era and a social group, therefore expressing the ways in which individuals relate to them (Bruner 1986a).

Within the actual conversations carried out for this research, the experience of first sexual intercourse was always told by participants in a narrative way; they told stories loaded both with the depiction of action and facts, and with moral evaluations of the event. This is an example of my conversation with a 30-year-old single woman from the rural town in Guanajuato:

BERTINA: Well... my aunt and uncle came... and when they do, they stay here for several weeks, and I can't remember where they had gone and only he [a friend] stayed, and I... I was too confident, he knocked at my door and I answered. He started talking about... about love and all these things and he asked me, 'what do you think about this place? How many times have you had sex?', I said 'none'. 'We'll see now', he said... And then, the following night I felt very sick, I mean I was throwing up... gee! Afterwards I told my mother, I don't know what happened to me. And I... I didn't want to tell her, I was like, scared, and I started telling her, and she said 'oh! how many times?'... well, she didn't say anything like... bad, because my mother is not bad, but my father did say 'Indian' because this boy is quite Indian looking, and he said, 'if you turn out bad [pregnant], he has to fulfill his obligation to you, or else we will go to the municipal authority. If, if you were willing or...'

RESEARCHER: Forced?

B: Forced.

R: And how was it?

B: Well, I was willing [giggles].

R: Were you?

B: I couldn't help myself.

(Bertina: 1)

Narratives like the above were not the only linguistic features participants used to describe their experience. Metaphor was a powerful device as well. As Haste (1993) has indicated:

Metaphors, symbols and images play a key role in

explanation, and define what is deemed to be salient. They are important, therefore, both in the individual's own interpretation and in communication with others; shared metaphors, symbols and images are crucial to the effective negotiation of meaning (Haste 1993:29).

Metaphors transform meaning through converting the thing described into something else, and providing both a frame for interpretation and a prescriptive value. Just as personal narratives, the metaphors we use to communicate our experience are drawn from the culturally available resources within our society. Haste (1993) analyzes in detail the use of metaphor in contemporary Western society in order to describe gender. Gender metaphors are usually about dualism and opposition, like active-passive, rational-intuitive, and they have been constructed as essential characteristics attributed to each gender. This dualism applied involves the negation of one of the terms in order to define the other: self is defined by being not other. In Western society, the place of this other has traditionally been occupied by woman. In Mexican society the Indian peoples have also been constructed as others by **mestizo** middle-class population in their definition of themselves.

Thus, the metaphors embedded within participants' accounts were another of the main tools for analysis. Let us consider again Saúl's (28 year-old construction worker from rural Guanajuato) testimony about his idea of first sexual intercourse:

SAUL: When I started to live in Celaya, I lived there, I lived there almost on my own, right? I lived with my relatives, and then for a while with my sister, I was renting there, and I started to have a little more freedom, so then I started to hang out with... with the wild cattle.

RESEARCHER: The wild cattle? with the men?

S: Yes, with the wild cattle and I started to... to be introduced to that, to sex.

R: Did your friends tell you about it?

S: Yes, or they would take us for a walk or we would go to the balls... first we'd go to the movies and we would see those... porno movies...

R: Is that how you learned how to...?

S: ...learned... more or less, I did it very late, when I was twenty or twenty-one.

R: So, there in Celaya you started to hang out with the wild cattle? And did they tell you that you had to smarten up?

S: Yes, the wild cattle used to say to me. We would do certain things among friends, we would say 'let's take this one to his first communion'... And we would grant a girl to the boy who was going to do his first communion... It was like a string that would bound us all together.

(Saúl: 2)

This quotation includes three metaphors that express different aspects of Saúl's construction of sexuality, gender and first sexual intercourse. Firstly, Saúl describes men as **wild cattle**, that is, as animals that run in a herd. This aspect signals the importance of the peer group, at least in terms of sexuality, which is the subject of our conversation. The qualifying **wild** adds a certain character to this metaphor, in the sense that these animals would supposedly lack any control of their sexual impulses. This metaphor might thus imply a certain conception of masculinity in which the peer group is regarded as a source of identity in terms of the impetuosity of male sexual activity. Another metaphor that Saúl uses to describe the strength of these male relationships is that the group is bounded by a **string**, which can also express a certain exercise of control of one another regarding sexual initiation. Last, the metaphor of first sexual intercourse as a boy's **first communion** describes the event as somehow sacred and ritual, and as initiatic of the boy's construction of adult male identity. These examples illustrate clearly the signifying power of the metaphors included in the conversations.

Sometimes in the conversations, the meaning of these metaphors was not shared by participants and researcher alike, and there was a need to elaborate further in order to build a mutual understanding. I resorted to Haste's recollection of Billig's work (1987) about rhetoric in order to analyze such disagreements. Haste (1993) argues that:

...any statement presupposes shared knowledge of

premisses and a tacit assumption of what is, and what is not, taken for granted - both facts and values (Haste 1993:55).

If anything has to be justified, explained or illustrated in the conversation through an example, it means that it is problematic -that there is no shared knowledge- and that there is a need for further negotiation of meaning. This concept of rhetoric helped to detect which meanings were problematic in the conversations.

Here is an example of this rhetoric process taken from a conversation with Gabriela, a 24 year old married woman from a zapotec town in Oaxaca:

GABRIELA: When he [her father] knew [about her having a boyfriend] he said: 'I didn't send you out to have a boyfriend, I sent you out to school, not to have affairs with boys... but you know how to behave'. 'I'm only telling you that I'm not doing anything bad, right?, just talking, that's normal, right?, that way I learn a little bit more about life'. And he said, 'it's your business what you do'. But later on he was calmer and he said: 'I can't tell you what to do. I just ask you to be respectable and never disappoint us'

RESEARCHER: Aha. And what would 'to disappoint' them mean?

G: Well, I guess it would mean, well... to have sex and that... well... because of inexperience... maybe... right?, because of lack of information and knowledge, well... sometimes there are some girls that... maybe... they get pregnant. I think that's what 'to disappoint' them and 'to abuse their trust' means.

(Gabriela:1)

In this excerpt, Gabriela considered that the meaning of **to disappoint them** was shared between her and the researcher, but the latter's request for further explanation proved her wrong and urged her to perform a meaning so that shared understanding could be attained.

Summarizing, all these forms of discourse - narrative, metaphor and rhetoric- are relevant to this study in that their use by participants and researcher show which were the dominant frames for interpretation of sexual experience, and in which areas a negotiation of meaning had to take place.

5.2. Dialogue and polyphony: the construction of self and other.

There is another feature that proved particularly useful for understanding participants' use of social discourses: polyphony and its role in the construction of self and other. As said before²¹, for Voloshinov (1929/1973) self is a gift from the other. Since I can never experience myself totally as a unified being, it is only the outsideness of the other that can bring me back such a total image of me. Poetic as it is, this image illustrates the main point in what I could call his social psychology. As Voloshinov says:

The subjective psyche is to be localized somewhere between the organism and the outside world, in the borderline separating these two spheres of reality (Voloshinov 1929/1973:26)

This middle ground in which the psyche comes into existence is language and, more precisely, dialogue. For this author, the subjective psyche does not exist apart from the sign. There may be physiological and organic processes, but experience can only exist through sign.

Psychic experience is the semiotic expression of the contact between the organism and the outside environment. That is why the inner psyche is not analyzable as a thing but can only be understood and interpreted as a sign (Voloshinov 1929/1973:26)

Thus, subjective experience is embodied in sign and so experience can be understood as inner speech. But even inner speech is dialogical because every word is a two-sided construction. Not only does it come from a concrete speaker, but it always takes into account the listener to which it is addressed, although this addressee may not be actually present. What does this imply for this research? That the stories, metaphors and descriptions that participants offered are dialogical in two main senses. First, they were constructed within a particular

²¹ See chapter II, 4.3. Dialogue and meaning.

situation; an actual dialogue between two persons with different ethnic, class and sometimes gender backgrounds. These differences were part of an inevitable power relationship established between the researcher and the participants. Second, the accounts are dialogical because our speech was often a polyphony in which many voices were quoted in order to construct a certain meaning.

These consequences are central to the strategy of analysis, for the meanings offered during the conversations had to be looked at both in terms of the immediate situation in which they were constructed as well as in terms of the social voices that were quoted in order to describe sexual experience.

In the conversations carried out for this research, quotes of other voices were continuously used by participants whether to tell stories or to give some kind of value to their words or to other persons' words. Through these polyphonies not only did the speaker bring into picture many different social languages regarding virginity or sexuality, but also his/her position before them. The next excerpt comes from a conversation conducted with Carmen, a 19-year-old virgin girl from indigenous Oaxaca:

CARMEN: Also my mom says that to me...

RESEARCHER: Does she? What does she say?

C: She says... 'don't go flirting with men when you go out to the streets'...

R: Why doesn't she want you to do that?

C: Well, I don't know...

R: What is she worried about?

C: That men... when girls do that to men they say 'uhf! she is an ordinary girl' [**cualquiera**] and my mom doesn't want them to say that about me.

R: ...about you. And who are the **cualquieras**?

C: Well, those that flirt with them, that's what men say.

R: And who are the **cualquieras**? How do they look like...? Have you seen them?

C: No.

R: You haven't?

C: No, I don't know who they are... They are the ones that flirt with men, those are the **cualquieras**, that's what men say, that's what they say...

R: And, have you seen them flirting?

C: No, I don't even know what that is.
(Carmen: 1)

This excerpt consists of a polyphony in which Carmen quotes at least three different voices: her mother's voice advising her against certain behaviour toward men, men's voices classifying women according to their sexual conduct, and Carmen's own position in the face of these voices, which she describes as ignorance, avoiding any clear stance before the issue of flirting. This example shows how the analysis of polyphonies was a powerful tool of analysis of conversations, because it could show both the dominance of certain discourses as well as the participants' experience facing them.

In the case of this research, I could recognize a number of social languages within the utterances, for example, that of the Catholic church, the family planning policies, the communities' traditional knowledge, media, etc. These languages were sometimes detected through a single phrase, but alongside them there was always my own and the participants' voices stating our position before them.

These social languages are, for Bakhtin, a historic sediment of a long process in which social change has been taking place.

We may even say that language and languages change historically primarily by means of hybridization, by means of mixing of various languages coexisting within the boundaries of a single dialect... but the crucible for this mixing always remains the utterance (Bakhtin 1981:358).

Here is an example of this 'hybridity' of social languages regarding sexuality. It was offered by Victor, a 15 year-old high school student from Mexico City when discussing with me the possibility of using contraception:

RESEARCHER: If she [his partner] did not want or could not take care of herself [use contraception], what would you do?

VICTOR: I would take care of myself and of her at the same time.

R: How would you do that? What would you use?

V: Well, normal, because pills and foams and those

things I wouldn't use them because they pollute. I would use a condom. Besides, they avoid any infection...

R: And why didn't you use it? [during his first intercourse]

V: Because I didn't have any.

R: Did you think about it?

V: Yes, I did.

R: So, what happened? You thought about it, but did you buy it or did you get it?

V: No, I couldn't.

R: Why?

V: Circumstances. I didn't buy it, I didn't even think of it (...)

R: What would your parents think about you using a condom?

V: That it would be OK, because it is a responsibility now, now that the situation is hard, but they never say anything to me. I don't know... it's embarrassing for me that they know and to ask them about this.

R: Why? What would they think if you carried a condom?

V: Well, it's embarrassing for me. I am the only one who must know about this... or maybe only a friend that could give me some information that would help me. It's only between friends.

(Victor: 1)

In this excerpt Víctor uses at least three different social languages: health campaigns, Catholic moral values and local notions of responsibility. In the first case, his account about the importance of preventing disease and unwanted pregnancy is based upon Government messages and programmes. The idea that sex is embarrassing derives directly from Catholic constructions of the body and sexuality as sinful, and his argument for responsibility in the face of adverse circumstance seems to be quoting his parents' and other adults' discourse regarding adolescent pregnancy. But his own voice tells about the difficulty to have access to condoms without risking certain judgment by a non-specified social addressee.

6. Interpretation.

I stress here that the interpretation offered in this research is only one of many possible, because it could only be done because of my own social situatedness.

It does not, therefore, claim a status of truth and generalization.

Since this work will be circulating in academic circles, it is undoubtedly an exercise of power through the production of knowledge. However, it tried to honor as much as possible the participants' culture and values through acknowledging my own situatedness and making it explicit when I imposed or respected participants' meanings. Still, the interpretations could be further validated by asking them to discuss them. In order to do so, I carried out a few evaluation meetings with some of the participants who were still available, but I found them quite uninterested. It seemed that the conversation itself was the main event for them.

In the interpretation procedure that I followed, I selected dense fragments of dialogue in order to analyze them in detail, trying to abstract and interpret the meanings of each metaphor, narrative, polyphony and taken for granted assumptions that participants and myself used.

The best way to show the procedure is through an example. The following excerpt was selected because of the importance given to the word 'bad' as a description of sexual practice, thus relating it directly with morality. This evaluation of sexuality was a key element in the construction of the subcategory of THE SACRED, for it was frequently associated with religion. Thus the category in question was THE MORAL DIMENSION OF SEXUALITY and the subcategory that the conversation illustrates was SEXUAL PRACTICE AS BAD AND/OR EVIL.

The next excerpt is taken from my conversation with Eduardo, a 25 year old married man from Oaxaca, who tells about his first sexual experience with a prostitute:

- 1 RESEARCHER: When you went to the prostitutes for the
- 2 first time, what did you expect?
- 3 EDUARDO: I didn't expect much, but at least a bodily
- 4 satisfaction, right?
- 5 R: So you didn't get even that?
- 6 E: No, not even that.
- 7 R: Were you nervous?

8 E: Yes, I was very tense... and she didn't... I
9 don't know if she was well paid but she didn't...
10 well, she didn't do anything for me... like a
11 partner would do, right? That was what I expected,
12 maybe. At least bodily [satisfaction], but I didn't
13 get it.
14 R: As a partner would do, right?
15 E: Yes, but it didn't... didn't happen.
16 R: So you didn't even have sex with her?
17 E: Well... yes, but I didn't have an orgasm...
18 R: You didn't ejaculate?
19 E: Well... yes, but not with the same satisfaction
20 that I had before, not even when I masturbated,
21 right? So that was quite...
22 R: ...of course, frustrating.
23 E: Frustrating.
24 R: And you say that you came out looking happy, why
25 did you have to come out looking happy?
26 E: Because of **machismo**.
27 R: What did your friends tell you?
28 E: Well... 'did you resist?', because I went into
29 the room and... I don't know how long I was there,
30 right? because I saw how men went in and out
31 quickly... and I went in and I wouldn't come out.
32 R: So they were timing you? To see how long you had
33 resisted?
34 E: ... and I didn't... I had just started and I
35 never really finished. And, besides, I washed my
36 body several times, also.
37 R: Was that why you were taking so long and your
38 friends thought that you had been in there for
39 hours?
40 E: That's right.
41 R: Do you think you could have said no to this
42 situation of the prostitutes?
43 E: Well, it was a little difficult.
44 R: Why?
45 E: Because... I was accumulating temptations, and
46 maybe I could have [refused] if I didn't have such
47 friends, right? They are a big influence... and they
48 are still my friends. Later on we talked about it
49 and said that it was not good... that it didn't even
50 give us satisfaction, right? So we never went back.

(Eduardo: 1)

Eduardo tells a story about his frustration during the experience of first intercourse with a prostitute. The dialogue starts with the exploration of his expectations which, although considered low by him, were not fulfilled. In his answer, he separates his body from the rest of his identity. It is possible that he would include emotion and bonding between partners as a part of

sexual relationships and that these were precisely the elements that were missing in the encounter with a sex worker -**I didn't expect much, but at least a bodily satisfaction, right?** (3-4)-.

My question locates in Eduardo's indisposition the explanation for his dissatisfaction -**Were you nervous?** (7)-which he confirms in his own words, but he makes the sex worker responsible for not being able to relax him, for not doing her job properly. This is suggested by his mention of payment -**I was very tense... and she didn't... I don't know if she was well paid but she didn't... well, she didn't do anything for me** (8-10)-. In fact, he expresses a longing for what he considers that a real **partner** would do in order for him to get satisfaction, therefore stressing that a relationship was important in order to be satisfied, even at the **bodily** level (8-13).

Then, Eduardo and I have a brief exchange in order to negotiate the meaning of **satisfaction**. My question inquires about the performance of intercourse, asking about arousal and erection -**So you didn't even have sex with her?** (16)-. Eduardo shows further sophistication by distinguishing between the physical practice itself and pleasure, and he does so by using a word from scientific discourses -**yes, but I didn't have an orgasm** (17)-. I intended to detail this further by asking about ejaculation (18), but he again makes a clear distinction between physiology and pleasure or **satisfaction**, thus showing that bodily function is not enough to encompass the whole meaning of sexual practice. In fact, the importance he places on relationships is shown by his next expression, in which he considers sex with a prostitute even less satisfactory than masturbation -**not with the same satisfaction that I had before, not even when I masturbated** (19-20)-. I show empathy with his account by offering **frustrating** as the meaning of his experience, and he accepts such definition (22-23).

I then change the subject by asking about a previous

expression of Eduardo, which described a certain emotion that he had to perform before somebody that was waiting for him outside **-And you say that you came out looking happy, why did you have to come out looking happy?** (24-25)-. His answer relates this performance directly to the construction of masculine identity, although by his use of the term **machismo** he places himself critically before it. This word could imply that Eduardo is familiar with and shares certain social discourses that question gender power as an asset for male identity (26). My next question goes back to the scenario of Eduardo's first intercourse by bringing in his **friends** as the audience of his performance of satisfaction (27).

His answer quotes them defining intercourse as resistance, therefore considering this practice both a challenge and an effort, but not a pleasurable activity born from a genuine desire **-'did you resist?'** (28)-. It is possible that the idea of resistance refers to the duration of erection through the whole process of penetration and ejaculation. The public character of the practice is then described by Eduardo in that his friends surveyed the process through **timing** him, and becoming thus the evaluators of his performance as a man **-I went into the room and... I don't know how long I was there, right? because I saw how men went in and out quickly... and I went in and I wouldn't come out** (28-31)-.

Next, he describes to me what happened inside the room: there is a hint of failure in his description, because he says that he **never really finished** (34-35), although he does not specify what 'to finish' means. In any case, the time he took inside the room is explained not because he was having sex, but because he washed his body repeatedly (35-36). This practice suggests that Eduardo felt dirty after intercourse and that he needed to wash the stain away. But this stain does not seem to be limited to the body for, if that was the case, one wash would have been enough. Rather, it is possible that

Eduardo felt dirty also emotionally and performed a purification ritual through water.

My final question derives from what I seemed to have grasped from his expression of first intercourse as a traumatic and frustrating experience that he would have liked to avoid but that, for some unspecified reason, he did not **-Do you think you could have said no to this situation of the prostitutes?** (41-42)-. His difficulty in refusing to go to the sex worker is explained by Eduardo because of two situations, one pertaining to himself and the other to his social situation. First, he describes his sexuality both as a cumulative force that needed to be expressed ultimately **-I was accumulating temptations** (45)-, and he relates such sensations to religious concerns by defining them as **temptations**²².

His other reason for not refusing this kind of sexual initiation was peer pressure **-maybe I could have [refused] if I didn't have such friends, right? They are a big influence** (46-47)-. It is interesting that in this brief explanation Eduardo describes a later conversation with his friends in which they all admitted such experience was neither good nor satisfactory, but that they all had to go through it. It seems that they were all obeying some kind of prescription that none of them really held as their own, but that they had to comply with in order to prove their masculinity. Once accomplished, this proof was not carried out again, thus showing it was never close to their desire **-Later on we talked about it and said that it was not good... that it didn't even give us satisfaction, right? So we never went back** (48-50)-.

This testimony reflects the experience of loneliness, fear and pressure that Eduardo lived with during his first intercourse and it also shows a paradox that accompanies this definition of masculinity: the

²² To see the relationship between sexual arousal and its relation to the sacred, see chapter V: **The moral dimension of sexuality: evil, the sacred and rituals of sexual initiation.**

anxiety that emerges by paradoxically attributing the control of erection to the will of the man produces the opposite effect: fear and absence of arousal and eroticism, which are precisely the conditions for erection. The demand for sexual performance is a paradox because it produces exactly the opposite; it generates impotence and therefore the questioning of masculine identity.

This example shows the interpretation procedure that led me to construct the thematic categories already mentioned, through the analysis of metaphors, narratives, polyphonies and power relationships between researcher and participant.

PART TWO

DIALOGUES ON SEXUALITY, VIRGINITY AND SEXUAL INITIATION

The second part of this thesis discusses the grounds for the theoretical categories that I constructed, drawing from field material and dialogue excerpts that illustrate each of the aspects that they are composed of. Such categories intend to discuss the different meanings offered by participants regarding sexual initiation and virginity, in the light of the hybridity of present Mexican culture.

These meanings have been organized in the next two chapters:

IV. The construction of gendered subjects of sexuality and the role of sexual knowledge.

V. The moral dimension of sexuality: evil, the sacred and rituals of sexual initiation.

But before addressing these issues, I will provide informational background of the communities where the study was carried out, as well as a brief biographical account of the participants.

1. The communities

As said before¹, I chose three different communities that could illustrate the hybridization of Mexico nowadays in order to do the fieldwork:

- an indigenous rural town in Oaxaca (south of the country)
- a rural community in Guanajuato (central Mexico)
- an urban neighbourhood in Mexico City.

The kind and quality of available background information about these communities varied considerably. While the indigenous town has been the site of previous

¹ See chapter III, 3.1. The sites.

ethnographic work (Stephen 1991) and the urban neighbourhood in Mexico City was the subject of a thesis on social work (Palomera 1993), the **mestizo** community of Guanajuato had not been studied in such a way. Also, official statistics on population and housing were available for the indigenous and rural towns, but not for the urban community, since it is part of a larger political entity. These differences of sources warn against taking the following descriptions as comparative data, because the parameters and methods by which they were obtained varied. Rather, they constitute brief depictions of several structural and cultural elements that can serve as background information for field materials. I could find no information on sexual behaviour in these communities (nor, for that matter, for each state), but only on fertility, marriage, education, work and migration, because sexuality has not been, so far, considered an important issue by the Government in its health and population policies.

1.1. The indigenous town

Since Mexican Indian cultures are deeply involved in the process of hybridization of culture, I chose to work in a community of Indian population that participated somehow in national society and culture through trade or any other activity. I chose the state of Oaxaca (south of the country) because it is among the states with a large Indian population as classified by language (32% of the total), and because it is mostly rural (46% of its communities have less than 50 inhabitants) (INEGI 1996b).

Oaxaca has the lower per capita gross domestic product in all of Mexico (US\$ 1136 in 1980) and it suffers from high underemployment, migration to other states and to the United States, and agricultural work only at the level of subsistence. Where there are no other sources of income, like craft production or

tourism, underemployment is higher during the slack months of the agricultural season, and migration in search for wage labour is frequent.

In terms of its population's economic activities, in 1992 60.3% of people older than 12 were economically active, and 98.1% of this total were occupied. The fact that 81.8% of the total of men and 40.4% of the total of women were active, reflects a higher activity than the national figures, although this does not necessarily mean better income. More men than women stated they were employed by someone else, and the majority of women that were economically active were self-employed (INEGI 1996b).

Of the economically inactive population of Oaxaca in 1992, 77.5% of the men were students, while 73% of the women did household chores (INEGI 1996b). These figures reflect the gender labour division prevalent in the state.

Although the exact quantity of microindustries in Oaxaca is hard to know because many of them are not officially registered, they represent an important source of income for many communities. These industries are mostly craft workshops like pottery, palm weaving, embroidery, **mescal** production, and wool and cotton weaving (Stephen 1991).

In terms of formal education, Oaxaca has a higher level of illiteracy (26.3%)² and school non-attendance than the national mean, so that five out of ten Oaxacans have not attended school nor have they completed elementary instruction, and only three out of ten have more than six years of schooling (INEGI 1996b).

In Oaxaca 56.5% of the population over 12 is either married or united, 35.7% is single and the rest (7.8%) is separated, divorced or widowed. The state's fertility rate is the second highest in the country: 4.6 children

² Illiteracy is defined as the percentage of population over 15 that declared not to know how to read nor how to write a message (INEGI 1996b).

per woman, while the national mean is 3.5. Official documents explain this difference by the state's disadvantaged situation on sociocultural aspects like women's education, economic participation, cultural values, and knowledge and attitudes toward contraception (INEGI 1996b). In Oaxaca, rural³ women have an average of 3.4 children, while urban women have only 2.2 which, in any case, is a higher mean than the national figures (INEGI 1996b).

The use of contraception in Oaxaca is low: 54.3% of women in reproductive age⁴ have never used contraception. It is the first state in terms of use of traditional methods (26.2% of all women users) like rhythm, **coitus interruptus** and herbal infusions, even though modern methods like oral contraceptives and sterilization have been promoted by Government health institutions, not always through an appropriate process of counseling. Many of the women who have been sterilized have submitted themselves to this procedure right after delivery in public hospitals, which have aggressive contraception programmes based on this method. It is interesting to note that, although a large number of Oaxacan women know about modern methods, they do not use them consistently (INEGI 1996b).

For selecting the site of research, I talked to members of **Casa de la Mujer**, a non-government organization that has worked with women in several communities near the capital city of Oaxaca, and they introduced me to several residents of a **Zapotec** town (whose name I will not reveal for reasons of confidentiality) in the central valleys of Oaxaca, about 30 km away from the city.

According to the latest data, this town has 4554

³ Rural areas are defined by official documents as communities with less than 2500 inhabitants (INEGI 1996b).

⁴ Women between 15 and 49 years old (INEGI 1996b).

inhabitants, 3612 of which (79%) speak **Zapoteco**, the Indian language, as well as Spanish (INEGI 1996a).

Historical information suggests that during the colonial period, the Indian population of this area declined considerably, mainly due to the lack of immunity from European diseases like smallpox, measles and the plague. Until the 1990s, the persistence of some of these illnesses caused the death rate to be higher than the birth rate, but the population remained fairly stable between 1860 and 1960, when it began to grow (Stephen 1991).

Regarding education, about 14.3% of the population over 15 have never attended school, 23.4% have not finished elementary school, and only 9.3% have studied beyond this level (INEGI 1996a). The youngest generations are attending school in significant numbers, and some families are sending their children to secondary and high schools, and to training institutions in Oaxaca. There is one kindergarten, two elementary schools and a junior high school within the community.

In terms of health services, the community has a Government health clinic and two doctors have a private practice there. When ill or for delivery, residents go to a larger health clinic located in a nearby town. This abundance of health services is recent, because before 1970 the population was taken care of by local **curanderos**⁵ that mixed divination and herbal remedies in their treatments (Stephen 1991). There is also a midwife that works as a promoter of contraception and AIDS prevention for a large non-governmental organization.

According to a survey carried out in 1986 (Stephen 1991), the economic activity that brings the greatest amount of income per household is textile production, which is either sold to tourists that come to the town, traded in Oaxaca and Mexico City or even exported to the

⁵ Traditional healers.

United States. Residents often combine weaving with other activities like merchant businesses, farming, service work and music performance. Although farming used to be the most important activity (60% of the households in 1930 declared it as their main occupation), it gradually gave way to weaving. Now, the majority of agricultural production is only for home and local consumption (Stephen 1991).

This shift has also produced social transformations in the town, because class inequalities have been introduced gradually. While most of the weavers own their means of production -their looms-, class differences are focused on the control over the labour process. Whether selling one's own labour or hiring others' is important, situation which is expressed in the differences between merchants and weavers. The former make a better income through selling others' work, while weavers live only from their own labour. Gender differences are also important in the production process, because women's roles as wives, daughters and mothers have been transformed by their active participation in weaving and by their household's class position (Stephen 1991).

Apart from weaving as a chief economic activity, many natives migrate in search for work, both to other states and to the United States. Although many of them stay there for good, some return periodically to the town and bring back some cash. It is calculated that about 500 natives lived in southern California in 1989 (Stephen 1991).

According to previous ethnographies (Stephen 1991) the most striking aspects of this **Zapotec** community are

...its successful expansion of weaving production for export and its retention of cultural institutions and events. These two foci have led previous ethnographers to two different conclusions: that [this town] is culturally conservative or that the socioeconomic structure of the community has been completely altered through integration with international capitalism (Stephen 1991:67).

Stephen (1991) concludes that both observations are accurate, for in this community there are both a great ritual tradition that combines prehispanic and Catholic elements, and a transformed ethnic identity due to its close contact and exchange with urban modern culture, both national and international. Recent generalization of formal education and the introduction of electronic media have participated in this process of change.

However, there can be no generalization about this process, because it has not been homogeneous for all the people in the town. Stephen (1991) says that:

...local indigenous identity has been maintained and perhaps strengthened by an indirect opposition to pressures of assimilation. This opposition has taken the form of a multidimensional ethnic identity -one face is shown to consumers of indigenous culture (such as tourists, importers, state agencies and foreigners who purchase indigenous crafts), and another operates within [the town] and is accessible to those who are members of the community by virtue of their participation in local networks and institutions (Stephen 1991:17).

Thus, even though the main emblems of this community's identity are their high-quality weaving, an elaborate ceremonial system and a unique form of **Zapotec** language, the construction of their ethnic identity has been strategic, in that it offers an appearance of unity and homogeneity to potential sources of income, while for members of the community themselves there are differences like those of class and gender (Stephen 1991).

Some of the elements that seem to have affected local sexual culture are migration, formal education, health and family planning services, media, and the introduction of pornography through clandestine videoclubs whose existence are known to all but acknowledged by few. The messages sent by these means, besides private peer conversations, seem to be influential in relation to concrete sexual images and practices.

In order to make contact with potential

participants, I was introduced to a cooperative of women weavers and to a local weaver and his family. Through them I met several members of the community who agreed to participate in the conversations.

1.2. The rural community

The choice of a rural site for this research was important in order to illustrate the construction of sexuality within **mestizo** rural population that was also in close contact with modern and urban culture through migration, media and education. The state of Guanajuato was selected because it has a long Catholic tradition and conservative politics regarding family and sexuality (its current governor belongs to the **Partido Acción Nacional**⁶) that have been very influential upon the sexual culture and values. But, just like the rest of the country, it has also participated in the transformation of culture brought about by modernization and globalization.

Guanajuato is a central state of the country, it has a great proportion of communities with less than 500 inhabitants (57% of all its localities), but it also contains three medium-sized cities (between one hundred and five hundred thousand residents) and one large urban concentration (INEGI 1996a).

Of its total population of approximately four and a half million people, a little less than half (47.7%) over 12 were economically active in 1992, and 97.1% were occupied at the time of the survey. From the total active population, 76.2% were men, thus making Guanajuato a state of lower economic participation than the national mean, particularly in the case of women (77.4% were inactive) (INEGI 1996c).

In contrast to Oaxaca, where many women were self-employed in 1992, in Guanajuato there was a higher

⁶ See chapter I, part iv) **Social actors: feminism and women's groups, gay and lesbian movements and right-wing groups.**

percentage of women employed by someone else (72.1%) than men (68.2%), and a higher percentage of women who worked without getting paid (14%) (INEGI 1996c). In fact, the highest percentage of inactive population in Guanajuato are women who do household chores (65.9%), which means a higher female inactivity than the national mean (58.6%).

These numbers might suggest that a gendered labour division that confines women mainly to the domestic sphere, while men are trusted with the responsibility of income for daily subsistence, is even stronger in Guanajuato than in Oaxaca. The reasons for this difference are many, but among them may be that in Oaxaca women have had to leave the household to work or to employ themselves in order to complete the family income, while in Guanajuato there could be relatively better conditions of work for men.

In fact, this state has a stable rate of migration, while Oaxaca expels many of its residents. This does not mean, however, that the population of Guanajuato does not migrate. While intra and interstate migration is low, Guanajuato is the third state in terms of the amount of international migrants, all of them to the United States (8.6%) (INEGI 1996c), where they go looking for wage labour in agricultural companies.

In terms of education, there is a lower level of literacy in Guanajuato (83.5%) than the national mean (87.1%), as well as a lower attendance to school. The educational profile of the state is inferior to national figures, since 17.8% of its population over 15 has not had any education and 26.4% have not finish elementary school. Only one third of this population has had education beyond 6th grade (INEGI 1996c).

Guanajuato has a higher percentage of single people over 12 than Oaxaca (44%), and less separated, widowed or divorced (5.3%). The rest of the population (50.7%) is married or united. In terms of fertility rate, Guanajuato is among the ten states with the highest, because it has

an average of 3.9 children per woman (INEGI 1996c).

The use of contraception in Guanajuato is even lower than in Oaxaca: 55.7% of women in reproductive age have never used any contraception, although most of them know about different modern methods like oral contraceptives, sterilization, IUD and condoms. Guanajuato is, however, one of the states in which traditional methods are more widely used (21.5% of all women users), along with Oaxaca. Nevertheless, the high percentage of sterilizations (35.8%) shows the importance that official contraception programmes place upon the permanent prevention of pregnancies (INEGI 1996c).

The selection of this research site was facilitated by the **Centro de Atención para los Adolescentes de San Miguel de Allende** (CASA), which is a non-governmental organization that provides health services and sexual and reproductive education to young population of rural Guanajuato, in the communities near the city of San Miguel de Allende. Their programme includes hiring adolescents as health and contraception peer promoters, who travel to the communities with different educational devices such as pamphlets, talks and videos.

My contacts with **CASA** helped me to choose a small community (about 700 inhabitants) about 20 km away from San Miguel de Allende, where there had been previous work on reproductive health and a group of women gathered every week to receive information. Unfortunately, there is no previous ethnographic information about the village, so the information provided here was gathered by myself and lacks the extension and depth of the description of the previous site.

Along with Querétaro, San Miguel de Allende provides most of the jobs for the population of small communities around them, specially in construction for men and services for women (INEGI 1992). This small community has only 684 residents, most of which (70%) can read and write, but only 19% of the population over 15 has

finished elementary school (INEGI 1996a).

Young people have had better educational opportunities by virtue of the proximity of the cities and of the importance parents have given to formal education as a means for social improvement. This educational evolution has brought about a transformation of the generational authority, specially regarding young people's individual decisions, who travel more easily than their parents to their jobs and recreational activities, located in the cities.

Animal breeding and farming are still carried out only for consumption, and many members of the community have started to look for jobs in the nearby cities. From the total population, 25% of it were economically active in 1990; half of them employed in the primary sector, a little less than half in the secondary sector and the rest in services⁷ (INEGI 1992).

Although the town does not have its own church, religion is very important and the Catholic Church is still influential regarding reproductive and sexual values. The local priest is considered an authority on these issues, although his preaching is not always followed. Ritual activities are very frequent, like pilgrimages to the Guadalupe shrine in Mexico City. These pilgrimages are made mainly by men, in order to thank the Virgin for certain gifts, to make a promise -like to stop drinking- or to offer certain sacrifices in order to attain something in return.

There are no health services within the community, although in the nearest town there is a Government clinic where young doctors provide medical services as part of their education. For illnesses that need hospitalization, as well as for some deliveries, people go to San Miguel de Allende to the local hospital.

⁷ The primary sector includes agriculture, animal breeding, forestry, hunting and fishing. The secondary sector is mining, oil and gas extraction, industry, energetics and construction.

However, there is a midwife to whom I was introduced and who, in turn, introduced me to several of the women. I could not get in touch with the men within the community, because the meetings held by **CASA** were considered a matter for women, but I met them through another health promoter that worked in a construction site where they were employed in San Miguel de Allende. The conversations were held in the city, away from their own communities.

1.3. The urban neighbourhood

Finally, since cities illustrate the process of modernization of culture in Mexico, it was important to document the social construction of sexuality in an urban setting. In order to select the area for research, I considered its accessibility, its working-class composition and the possibilities I had to get in touch with its population. I chose a neighbourhood in the southern part of the city where a non-government organization had worked for some time in reproductive health issues with the women of the community.

Since this area is part of a larger political entity - **Delegación Coyoacán** and **Distrito Federal** or Mexico City-, some of the demographic data that I could gather about its population cannot reflect its reality, because **Coyoacán**, for instance, also includes middle and high-class residential areas.

I resorted to a study carried out by a social worker that describes the main characteristics and the history of the neighbourhood, albeit it does not include any fertility and reproductive health data (Palomera 1993).

The demographic data on the **Distrito Federal** cannot be taken as if its population was homogeneous, although it shows general trends that are related to its urban character in terms of educational and job opportunities, access to information and health services and cultural

transformation of sexuality. For instance, it has a higher educational profile because 94.2% of its population over 15 reads and writes, while the national average is 87.1%. Also, 66.3% of this same group of age has studied beyond elementary school, in contrast with the national mean of 44.3% (INEGI 1996d).

However, the gendered division of labour is consistent with the other two sites: while 71.7% of the total economically active population were men, 63.4% of the inactive group were women. Out of this total, the women that do not account as 'active' because they carry out household chores are a lower percentage (46.6%) than that of the national mean (58.6%) (INEGI 1996d). In fact, the proportion of economically active women who are employed as workers and employees is higher (81.1%) than the proportion of men in the same job situation (72%) (INEGI 1996d).

All these data may serve as context for understanding why the **Distrito Federal** has the lowest fertility rate of the country (2.2 children per woman in reproductive age, while the national mean is 3.5 of children per woman). However, there are also important differences between rural and urban areas within the capital itself, because in the first case the average of born children to a woman is 1.6 and in the rural settings of the capital the mean is 2.4 (INEGI 1996d).

The success of population control campaigns has been particularly strong in Mexico City, where the knowledge about contraception is more widespread than in the rest of the country. Also, more than half of women in reproductive age have used contraception sometime. Of those that were using contraception at the time of the national survey, 42.1% had been sterilized, 24.1% were using the IUD and 11.6% oral contraceptives (INEGI 1996d). Women's preference for the permanent method of contraception has been widely questioned by feminist organizations because it might respond more to the

Government's anxiety to curtail population growth, than to an informed choice on the part of the women⁸.

The neighbourhood where field work was carried out emerged from a land invasion in 1948 by a group of families that lived in a neighbouring area, who were being pushed out of their settlements because of the growth of the city. From the start they fought to make the possession of these lands legal, something that could not be accomplished until very recently (Palomera 1993).

By 1952, a large group from Guanajuato was contacted by local leaders in order for them to populate the area. Sixteen families moved in and started to invite their relatives and friends. By 1956 there were already 160 families, who lacked public services and relied on collective work for whatever they needed. Other invasions both from the city and from rural areas happened during the 1960s, making the control and organization of the settlers very difficult (Palomera 1993).

By 1962 there were five groups that disputed the control of the residents and their struggle for legal property. There were about 3500 families living in the area at the time. The construction of houses forced the city Government to provide some public services and to delineate streets and lots, acknowledging the settlement and preventing it from being evacuated by the authority (Palomera 1993).

There is no available information about the total population of the neighbourhood, but the study used a sample of 927 families (5005 people) in order to do a survey to describe general characteristics of the population (Palomera 1993).

About half of the surveyed population over 15 was economically active and was working at the time of the study. 28.9% were dedicated to household chores and 14.5% of this population were students. There were no residents

⁸ See chapter I, 4.4, iv. **Social actors: feminism and women's groups, gay and lesbian movements and right-wing groups.**

that worked in the agricultural sector, but some in the secondary sector (28.4%) as workers in factories, textile and pharmaceutical industries and construction. The rest of the economically active population worked in diverse services as employees in supermarkets, taxi drivers, gardeners, merchants, plumbers, federal employees, maids, etc. There are no statistics on sex for this area.

The neighbourhood here described belongs to the broader area of **Coyoacán**, which is one of the districts of Mexico City. For this district, figures are similar than that of the smaller area surveyed for this study. 29.5% of **Coyoacan's** economically active male population were occupied in the secondary sector in 1990, while 67% were working in the tertiary sector. However, 80% of the women worked in service industries, and only 15.6% in the industry and construction (INEGI 1995b).

In terms of education, the population over 15 has had better opportunities than those from Oaxaca and Guanajuato. Almost all children between the ages of 6 and 14 go to school and only 5.29% of the population over 15 is illiterate. Almost one third has finished elementary school and about 26% have finished secondary and high school. Only 9.8% of this population have undergone professional studies (Palomera 1993).

There are two kindergartens, four elementary schools and one secondary and junior high schools in the neighbourhood. There is only one Government clinic that does not have hospitalization services, and three Catholic churches.

Even though this neighbourhood belongs to the capital city, it somehow resembles a closed community in that the residents have close relationships of collaboration and even surveillance of each other, as the result of their long history of collective struggles for the legalization of their properties.

These social movements for housing have worked as an element for the construction of a certain identity of the

community, in relation to the civil organizations that for a long time were the meeting point of the residents. Young people, however, do not participate in these organizations as their elders did, and so their strength has decreased after many of their demands have been satisfied.

I worked with **Salud Integral para la Mujer (SIPAM)**, a non-governmental organization that works in sexual and reproductive health issues with young people and women, and they helped me to get in touch with the authorities of the secondary school, where I carried out most of the conversations for this research.

2. The participants.

2.1. The indigenous town

The men

JOSE

Really, things happen, right?. Me and her... now that I've had that experience with her [sex]... it could be taken as an obligation... We've had sex twice or three times after that. The first time I had it with her... I've always respected her and she has respected me. Now that we've had our first experience it is not that it will become an obligation...

José was born in the town, he is 21. He studies high school in English in the neighbour city of Oaxaca and he helps in the family business of construction materials. He has a girlfriend in the city whom she sees regularly and with whom he had his first intercourse. He speaks **Zapotec**, Spanish and some English. He has migrated to the United States twice and done some studies there, living with relatives. He now lives with his five brothers and sisters and his parents and he does not want to get married yet because he wants to study at the University.

JORGE

I thought that by getting married I would get to

know a woman... and... I'm going to tell you something very personal... I was too young when I got married... the truth is that... I have known more women after I got married, more than when I was young but... what can I do about it?

Jorge is 30, he was born in the town as the youngest of a family of seven children. After studying two years of accounting he had to leave school in order to support his family. He has been married for ten years and has a daughter and a son. He owns his own loom and manufactures traditional weavings that are sold to tourists, since he found this to be a better paid job than being an employee. He is a member of a basketball team that matches teams from other towns. He had his first sexual intercourse when he got married to a local girl. He speaks both **Zapotec** and Spanish.

EDUARDO

I used to masturbate for some time then, but I... I wanted something more... and that's what took me there [to a brothel]. But the truth is that... she charged me, she charged me so much! And afterwards, since I was nervous and it was cold and everything... well, I don't think that it was cold outside, but that I was cold inside.

Eduardo is 25 and, although he studied mechanics, he works as an employed weaver for other people of the town. He would like to study painting at the school of Fine Arts of Oaxaca but the family budget does not allow it. He is married and has two children. He is worried that he cannot have sex with his wife because she says it hurts. He had his first sexual intercourse when he was a young boy with his older sister. He says that he feels very guilty about it and he is concerned about his sister, who lives away and is abused by her husband. Eduardo regrets he cannot help her.

CARLOS

I suppose women want their future husband to be a virgin but, what can they do? Get mad? Well, let them get mad. They lose. Because, if the guy gets mad he can leave her, and she's the one who is going

to pay for it. It's not convenient for women.

Carlos is 18. He has one sister and four brothers with whom he lives along with his parents. He was born in the town and he works as a butcher in the marketplace's family business. He studied up to 9th grade and he left school in order to work. He does not speak the Indian language. He came to meet me with his friend, Fernando. He has not had sexual intercourse.

FERNANDO

There is a custom here to steal the girl, but sometimes something happens... they take the girl and they do that [sex] but sometimes they can't satisfy the woman. They didn't know her sexually before and problems come. I think it would be good to know your partner sexually before getting married.

Fernando, who is also 18, does not speak **Zapotec** either. He is studying technical high school in electro-mechanics and helps in the weaving family business during the afternoons, after school. He has only one sister and he intends to work in the city once he has finished his education, but he is hesitant about it because the family needs his labour. He is a virgin.

The women

GABRIELA

Before, I didn't know anything, and now I see things differently, because now that I'm here, finally with a man, I feel I have new responsibilities. Now I have to think that I have a different future, because I used to think that I would go on studying and accomplishing something and... now it's the same, right?, but with a partner, I was going to do it on my own, now I have to support him in order to accomplish something else, right?

Gabriela was stolen by her boyfriend a few months ago and had her first intercourse then. Her partner was left by his first wife and is raising three children who live with the couple. She is 23, has no children of her own and she works in household chores and weaving for the family business. She is bilingual and studied up to 10th

grade. She used to take music lessons in the city of Oaxaca, because she was the only woman that played with the town's band. She used to travel with the band and her father would go along in order to look after her. She quit playing music in order to fulfil her role as a housewife.

CARMEN

Last year we had a party at home and... a boy came, he's my mother's godfather's son and he came home to the party and he asked me to dance and we danced a lot and my parents saw me and scolded me bad because they said 'why with that man?, why didn't you dance with another one? don't you see that's my godfather's son?', my mother said... and I said 'there's nothing wrong with it, we just danced', and she said 'that's how they start'.

Carmen has not finished elementary school. She speaks Spanish with certain difficulty. She is 19 and lives with her parents, working in household chores and weaving. She has not had any boyfriends and she is still a virgin. Carmen has joined a cooperative of women weavers from the town. She has lived there all her life and she complains that she is not allowed to go anywhere, while her sister is privileged to go to school and work outside the house.

MARTA

I felt that if I took any precautions [contraception] he was... he was going to say that I was a very experienced person, I was afraid of that... that he would say that I already... that I had been with other men... **machismo** is always there, men want to know everything and you are ignorant... and I thought that it was not logical to get pregnant the first time... but I did.

Marta is single, she got pregnant during her first sexual intercourse and, although the father left when he knew she was pregnant, she decided to have the baby. Unfortunately, she had a miscarriage. She is 25, and she moved to Mexico City as a young girl with her parents, where she studied to be a secretary. A few years ago her

mother died, and her father decided to go back to the town and started a weaving business where Marta works. She does not like to live in the town. Marta does not speak **Zapotec**.

CLAUDIA

Well, when men let you down, at least you can keep your children, right?

Claudia was born in the town 30 years ago, and she was raised there, so that she is bilingual. She studied to be a kindergarten teacher and worked away for a few years, but she quit her job and came back when she was engaged to her future husband during her visits to her parents. She had her first sexual intercourse once she was married (three years ago) and she has two daughters. Her main occupations are her children's care and household chores but, when she has some spare time, she weaves. Besides her nuclear family, Claudia lives with her mother, her brother-in-law and his family.

LOURDES

Uhm... when the penis enters the vagina... I mean, does it hurt or what? I haven't asked anybody, I really don't feel like trying... does it hurt?

Lourdes is 16, she is a high school student in Oaxaca and she wants to go on to study medicine. She works as a weaver for the family business when she comes back from school. Her mother is the leader of the cooperative of women weavers in the town. She plays in a local female basketball team with which she travels to other towns to hold matches. She was born in Mexico City but she came back to the town as a very little girl. She does not speak the local language.

2.2. The rural community

The men

ARMANDO

I took her with me after a party, after I came back from the United States, and we had planned it and I wanted to go there again but she said 'No, what if you don't come back? You have enough money already'. 'OK', I said, 'I'll take you... you tell your mother so that she won't be looking for you, you tell her that you're going with me, so that she won't get worried, OK?'

Armando has been married for 5 years and has two children. He is 23 and has finished elementary school. When he met his future wife he decided to work in the United States for a while in order to get some money for the wedding. He says that he waited to get married in order to have his first intercourse. He is now a construction worker in the city of San Miguel de Allende, but he lives in the rural areas that surround it.

ALBERTO

Girls are not like they were anymore, aren't they? They go out with a boy and then with another one, it's natural... as long as you have nothing else with them... as long as they don't have children, right? I mean, I wish they were virgins but... It would be nice that they wouldn't know anything and you did but... you think they are still virgins and they're not.

Alberto works as an assistant to a blacksmith, he is 18 and lives with his family to whom he gives his salary. He did not finished elementary school. Often, he goes to balls in the small rural communities where he can have sex with a girl he does not know and to bars in the cities where he pays for a prostitute, which was the way in which he was initiated sexually.

GUILLERMO

I was worried that she could get pregnant [during his first intercourse], I said to myself 'Maybe she'll get pregnant and they will want me to take responsibility, to marry her... Yes, I was afraid of

that... but no, girls take care of themselves... But I wasn't really worried because I didn't force her, I didn't force her, and she didn't force me either, so if she got pregnant it would be her problem, I would just stay away.

Guillermo has been married twice. He has two children from his first marriage and a third with his present wife, with whom he has been married for four years. He does not see the children from the first marriage because his wife took them. Guillermo was 'treated' to a prostitute by his friends in the city when he was about 16. He is 25 years old and he attended school until third grade. He worked in the United States for several months but he currently works as an employee for a golf club in San Miguel de Allende.

SAUL

Once we made love in the morning and then in the afternoon. Gee! 'how do you do it? [to his wife], gee! you do it like... as if I were, twice you have contractions in the same day, but me in the same day...' it's hard, isn't it? I, as a man, force myself more than she does!

Saúl just got married two months ago, at the age of 28. He is eager to have a child and what he calls 'a home and a family'. He was born in the rural areas of San Miguel de Allende where he now works in the construction industry. He has worked in Mexico City and in other cities of the provinces as an industrial worker as well. He did not finish elementary school. He had his first intercourse with a prostitute during a spree with his friends.

The women

BERTINA

Sometimes I think that, if I find a boyfriend and he says to me 'let's get married'... well, I say, if I get married... what if he strikes me, what if he turns out to be a drunk and he leaves me with a lot of children... disabled as I am, it's hard, so I really think about it.

Bertina is a 30-year-old single woman. When she was

little she had an illness that left her with a severe limp. She blames her father for not taking proper care of her. She studied at technical secondary school in order to be a teacher for adults in her community. She lives with her parents and siblings and takes care of household chores, and of younger brothers and sisters. She has had several boyfriends but she does not want to get married. Her first intercourse happened with a boy she was related to when he came to visit the family.

ALICIA

He [her husband] tried to talk to me, but... I don't know, I wasn't interested and... once he wrote to me when he was there [in the United States] and I didn't answer and he came and he always tried to talk to me but... I don't know, he annoyed me, until one day he said to me clearly: 'I won't leave unless I take you home [to his family's] with me'... I still said no, I told him to go and then... I don't know, suddenly, I don't know... I accepted and I started to live with him and later we got married.

Alicia has just had her third child (at 30) assisted by the local midwife. Her husband (for 5 years) is away working in the United States because the harvest was not good enough to support the family this year. He comes home every two or three months and stays in the community for a month. Alicia studied only up to second grade of elementary school. Before she got married she worked as a maid in a hotel in the city of San Miguel Allende. She had her first intercourse when she was taken by her future husband and is now dedicated to her family.

AMANDA

The truth is that I was not a virgin when I left with my boyfriend, I wasn't. It wasn't because I wanted to... or maybe because I did, maybe because I wanted to, and that's why my mom was so... how can I say?... traumatized, so that she would always follow me because... once, because I was foolish... well, the truth is that I was innocent.

Amanda (23) was born in rural Guanajuato and sent to live in Mexico City with relatives when she was 12. She

studied technical secondary school and worked in several provincial cities before coming back to the town and getting married. She had her first sexual relations with a boy when she lived away from her family. She feared she would not be accepted by any man since. She is now married and has a little son.

2.3. The urban neighbourhood

The men

VICTOR

Uhm... after... having sex... is it true that a man cannot grow up anymore and, if a woman has a child, she cannot grow up either?

Victor is a secondary school student at the age of 15. He lives with his parents and with his siblings and his time is dedicated exclusively to studying. He had his first intercourse with an older girl to whom he is related and who came for a visit with the family. He was very concerned about the consequences of intercourse at what he considered such an early age: pregnancy and physical damage.

AURELIO

Young people are looking for this [sex], but they get confused that it is love, right?, and it is only sexual appetite, so that when they take it out everything ends.

Aurelio is also 15 and studies at secondary school. He has two older sisters with whom he lives along with their parents. His father used to work far away but he came back the previous year. He has not had intercourse but is discussing the possibility with his girlfriend in order to use contraception. He does not know where to ask for help regarding this. He met his girlfriend in a disco to which he goes almost every evening.

JESUS

I brought up the subject of condoms because... well... because I was thinking of her and of our future, that's why. Well... I trusted her... I knew she was not infected or anything like that. It was simply that I am serious with her and I didn't want to destroy a life, and less that of a baby.

Jesús was born in the neighbourhood 20 years ago. He studies economics at the university. He lives with his parents, and his six siblings, along her sister's husband and their daughter. He has had only one girlfriend with whom he had his first sexual intercourse at her request. Recently, he was concerned because his girlfriend had a delay in her period, which finally turned out not to be caused by pregnancy.

The women

SOLEDAD

I didn't do anything, I can't understand, with this one [her husband] in a moment I fell for him, I don't know, he talked so nice to me!... he had a lot of details, he was loving and sincere and I said, 'I'm staying right here, I'm staying right here'... but I didn't think of the consequences [of sex]. The thing is that I surrendered to him... but I would have liked to enjoy life for a while... not to have a rushed wedding, worried about what people would say...

Soledad is 24. She studied to be a secretary and she worked for a while, before she got pregnant from her second boyfriend and married right away. She has one daughter and lives with her husband and her family of origin. Although her mother works as a health promoter, especially regarding contraception, Soledad regrets that she did not use any protection when she first had sex with the man that later became her husband.

PATRICIA

As the teacher said, if you don't feel OK with it [sex], why would you have to do it? Besides, if you are going to start a sexual relationship, it's better to do it with a stable partner, isn't it?

Because if the condom fails, at least you know you will have his support and that you have somebody and that the baby will be born a wanted child, within a marriage or union or whatever, as long as it is a stable relationship.

Patricia is a 15 year-old secondary school student. She expects to enter university to study psychology. She lives with her parents and her sister, who is the single mother of two small children. Patricia was raised by her sister because her parents worked all the time. She has not had sexual intercourse although she has had a couple of boyfriends at school. She says that she cannot imagine what it feels like and that she would be very nervous.

MERCEDES

Those women who are interested only in sexual satisfaction... they are wrong. If you go out with somebody and... you go to bed with him... I don't know... I feel that I wouldn't be satisfied... I wouldn't feel OK with myself. And, if I make love with a person, only because... because I went out with him and we went to bed... that's dirty.

Mercedes works as a cook for her husband's small family restaurant in the neighbourhood marketplace. She is eight months pregnant with her first baby, which was the reason why she got married six months ago. Three of her sisters also got married because of pregnancy. She regrets that she has 'failed' her mother with this. She is 22 and she lives with her husband's family. She was the eighth child of a family of nine, in which the father left when she was a younger child. She had her first sexual experience at 16, with a previous boyfriend.

Once briefly described, these participants were grouped according to the ways in which their accounts informed and illustrated different theoretical categories and subcategories that I constructed from field material. As said before⁹, the reasons for this classification are that the differences between their accounts were not homogeneously distributed by community, but showed

⁹ See chapter III: 4. The process of research.

diverse degrees of hybridization of discourses of sexuality. Sometimes, these differences went along with participants' education and migration experience, but the kind of qualitative analysis done here cannot claim that these social factors can explain the accounts. In fact, if I were interested in finding the causes of these differences, I would have to follow a more positivistic approach in which structural factors could be significantly linked to the theoretical categories. Since I am more interested in the density of the meanings offered, rather than in the circumstances that cause them, I made such theoretical groupings. In the following chapters the groups will be mentioned as to what aspect of the categories they illustrate.

IV

THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED SUBJECTS OF SEXUALITY AND THE ROLE OF SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE

Before describing the meanings that participants ascribed directly to sexuality, I will discuss certain aspects of their construction of themselves as subjects in general and as subjects of sexual desire and practice, because these categories provide a basis for understanding the interpretation of the rest of their accounts.

As described above¹⁰, subjectivity and sexuality are closely linked to the construction of the modern subject and it is a matter of this research to discuss how much such concepts can be applied to Mexican culture, as illustrated by these conversations. The following discussion addresses such theoretical issues through interpreting participants' and researcher's utterances.

¹⁰ See chapter II: *Subjectivity, sexuality and experience*.

1. The construction of an autonomous individual

Throughout the process of research, I perceived different degrees of individualization and acknowledgement of the self as subject of discourse, sexual desire and practice, and of autonomous action in general. Since the cultural hybridization of Mexican culture pushes individuals toward an entitlement of self as autonomous, it is important to assess the relevance of this process for the participants of this research.

Both Voloshinov's (1929/1973) and Bruner's (1986) works informed the construction of this category, in that they hold the idea that there is a close relationship between dialogue, narrative, and the construction of self as a subject with an individual identity. Thus, the differences in the richness of discourse and/or in the participants' ability to describe themselves suggested a link between speech and the possibility of frontal resistance to dominant norms. For instance, there was a group of individuals who were able to describe their experience of sexuality and that could also separate themselves from the normativities of their social group. This situation was expressed by utterances like 'in this town, people think...' and suggested that these participants did not accommodate easily to the way others attempted to define and constrain their sexual activity.

Here is an example of this kind of construction of self, offered by Marta, a young single woman from Oaxaca who had lived in Mexico City:

- 1 MARTA: ...the city is different to a town in many
2 things, how people treat one another, everything,
3 how one behaves...
4 RESEARCHER: What is different here?
5 M: There are many complexes here. In a town, there
6 are many complexes... for instance, we came back
7 [from Mexico City] and people would look at us as if
8 we were freaks, because... well... we have different
9 ideas. I mean, it's not that I feel superior to
10 them... but many things that I can see, that I think

11 are OK, they just don't see them, or they think they
12 are not OK.
(Marta: 1)

Marta starts her utterance by asserting conclusively that rural and urban cultures are different (1). She does not do this in terms of her relative point of view, but she constructs herself as an objective and disengaged speaker that only shows what reality is, and then she goes on to give examples of the areas of these differences (2-3).

My question suggests that I did not share with Marta the meaning of those differences, and that I needed further information, especially regarding the town (4). Then, Marta uses psychological jargon to describe the town -**There are many complexes here** (5)- thus showing a certain familiarity with such modern discourse and setting herself up as a scientific judge of the character of the community. She does not say that some people in the town have **complexes**, but that **complexes** are an abstract entity that is embedded in a collective subject called **town**. The word **complexes** also speaks of a psychological deficiency that she observes in the **town**, thus considering it somehow inferior to the **city**.

In order to advance her argument, Marta uses an example from her own experience of returning to her hometown from Mexico City (6). A collective subject -the **people** (5)- is considered to differentiate between **us** (her family) and **them** (the **people**) thus suggesting the existence of a collective identity to which Marta and her family did not belong. In fact, her experience is that **people** considered them odd, even abnormal -**freaks**- because they did not conform to that collectivity in terms of ideological issues (7-8). With this shift, Marta shows that she perceives the differences between her kind (migrants) and the **people's** kind (the sedentary) and that she stood out because of her different ideas.

Next, she goes on to express a modern idea of

equality by denying that she considers herself **superior** (7-8) to the **people**. This operation could be interpreted as its exact opposite, that is, that she in fact sees herself as more experienced, more open, or more knowledgeable, but that she has to deny it in order to conform to an ideal of respect and equality. This interpretation can be grounded in the next utterance, by which she asserts that she sees **things**, that she is more aware and more tolerant **-but many things that I can see, that I think are OK, they just don't see them, or they think they are not OK** (9-12)-.

This excerpt shows the importance that Marta gives to the experience of migration as an element for differentiation from the culture of origin, and shows that the value of individuality is high for her. This dialogue also expresses that Marta appreciates urban culture more than rural and indigenous values. There is a nuance of contempt that is suggested precisely by its opposite: her need to deny her disregard for her culture of origin.

Other theoretical group within this category was formed by those participants who did not describe their cultural environment as separate from themselves, and who could not put their sexual experience in words as openly. Those who did not tell a story about their lives, seemed to consider themselves part of a collective identity, and therefore could not consider the dominant narrative of their social group to be relative, neither could they explicitly oppose it, since both participant and community seemed to be one and the same thing. It is difficult to illustrate this situation because it is expressed precisely in the absence of an individualistic discourse that would stand against the collective subject. The closest example could be the next excerpt from a conversation with Guillermo, a 25-year-old employee from rural Guanajuato, who argues for the preservation of traditional rules of sexual behaviour:

1 GUILLERMO: Well, here in the farms, you know how
2 nowadays children run the house even more so than
3 parents do...
4 RESEARCHER: Really?
5 G: Well, girls go out, they leave, and there are
6 many places where they can do it [have sex].
7 R: What kinds of places?
8 G: Well, out there in the farms, there's nobody
9 there...
10 R: You mean in the fields?
11 G: Yes, in the fields, because there's nobody
12 watching there, nobody watches you.
13 R: Nor the girls?
14 G: No, they just let them, they just let the girls
15 free to go where they want...
16 R: What do you think about that?
17 G: Well, it's not right, it wouldn't be right...
18 they have to prevent them from... from going out
19 like that, a lot... well, parents should prevent
20 them from going out a lot, they shouldn't let them
21 go out, but you know how many let them do whatever
22 they want...
23 R: Why are girls at risk when they go out?
24 G: Well, it's not that they are at risk, they are
25 not at risk, they simply do... I think they have
26 boyfriends... they go out to look for boyfriends
27 anyway. Just like they go out to get water, since we
28 don't have running water out there in the farms,
29 they go out to bring water to the house and one goes
30 and talks to them there and so one starts to fall in
31 love with them.
(Guillermo: 1)

In this example, Guillermo describes a transformation that he assumes I am familiar with: **you know how nowadays** parental authority is being challenged and overcome by children (1-3), in this case by girls. This is, for him, the reason for a mistake regarding young women's freedom of movement (5-6), which gives them the opportunity to have sex. After describing the places where sex can occur (5-15), I ask directly for Guillermo's opinion on this issue (16). It seems that it was not clear for me what his stance toward this situation was, that is, I did not know if he had an individual point of view. His answer does not come from his own voice, but from an impersonal and omnipresent speaker that speaks an abstract and universal norm **-it's not right, it wouldn't be right (17)-** so that the

prohibition of women to wander around is uttered as an imperative to be complied to, not as a point of view among others. This could be interpreted from the way he speaks the norm because the imperative is not related to any speaker at all, and its transgression is considered a kind of exception to the rule (17-22).

By the end of the dialogue Guillermo describes a sort of role-playing in which the girls, the girls' parents and himself as a man from the community play the parts (24-31). It seems there is a fixed setting in which, if the girls go out, the consequence is that men can talk to them and fall in love with them, which could be the preliminaries for sex. In these lines, Guillermo does not speak of himself as an individual subject with the desire to meet a girl, but as one of many actors in this play. This is suggested by the use of **one** instead of **I -there one goes and talks to them and so one starts to fall in love with them** (29-31)-.

The possibilities of having or not a 'voice' of their own coincided broadly with the combination of participants' age, higher educational level and experience of migration. Those men and women who had finished at least elementary school and that had lived in an urban setting, at least temporarily, showed a greater discursive richness when describing themselves. Urban participants younger than 16 and rural individuals with lower educational background and without experience of migration, expressed themselves with less descriptive resources. By contrast, older participants from the city talked about themselves as individual subjects, with wishes and aspirations they felt entitled to satisfy. However, they were also very committed and loyal to family norms, especially around sexuality.

Thus, men and women both from Guanajuato and Oaxaca that had studied and migrated showed more possibilities of individual choice and self-perception as subjects than those that were sedentary. In the case of the rural

community of Guanajuato, this degree of autonomy, -both men's and women's- seemed to be fostered both by migration and education, and by the absence of an ethnic identity which could allow for a higher degree of individuality. **Zapotecs**, however, often complained that they still had to obey what they called 'the custom', which often goes against their wishes. For instance, some of the **Zapotec** women had some freedom to engage in activities that profited them individually when they were single, but they lost them when they formed a couple.

These circumstances could be crucial factors because they seemed to help the first group of participants to depict their community's culture as rigid, and to render their cultural origins as relative, as one way of seeing the world among many others. These participants could describe their places of origin as having one point of view, and not anymore as if they were the world itself.

Also, the diversity of discourses that communities offered their members seemed to foster individual differentiation because, as long as there is only one dominant narrative in terms of ways of life and moral expectations -as could be thought of in so called 'traditional' societies-, identity and subjectivity are fused with the social group.

In contrast, the offer of different or even contradictory models in urban cultures -a process that is increasingly happening in these communities- forces the subject to choose and also to define him/herself individually within a variety that sometimes burdens and confuses him/her. In fact, for Giménez (1992), this is a major landmark of modernity:

...that which is characteristic of modern society is mainly the absence of a unitary symbolic universe (represented by religion in pre-modern societies) capable of integrating norms and institutional spaces and to grant meaning to individuals' lives. Modern society would be a culturally decentered society, characterized by the multiplication of symbolic heterogeneous referents not articulated with one another (Giménez 1992:198*).

2. Subjects of sexual desire and practice: a gendered sexuality.

While the construction of an autonomous individual was present among participants' discourse from diverse research sites, the idea of a subjectivity that includes sexual desire and practice was clearly split in terms of gender among all of them. In order to illustrate this, I will discuss several images participants constructed about who they considered to be subjects of desire, entitled to have sexual feelings and needs. These images seemed to be quite stereotyped and were closely related to dominant discourses -especially Catholic morality- that define male and female sexuality. Even though these images make clear-cut differences between men's and women's sexuality, both male and female participants contributed in their construction. What was different, however, was their position before such images. Often, their experience of sexual desire and practice was not so easily classified within the stereotyped images, but rather played a dynamic interaction between prescriptive metaphors and their resistance or acceptance of them.

Primarily, it draws from the conversations that it is in **man's** nature to be a subject of sexual desire; he naturally wants, feels and seeks his sexual satisfaction. An intrinsic condition of maleness pushes toward sexual activity. **Woman**, however, does not possess this call of nature. Desire is defined as naturally gendered and it is male. It is only a matter of physiological evolution that **man** comes to experience sexual arousal. This evolutionary concept is clearly illustrated by Guillermo, from Guanajuato:

1 RESEARCHER: ...you say that you don't know how young
2 boys start to have sex, you've told me that they go
3 out on sprees, but... you know? many times men are
4 told 'come on, let's go, it's your turn, you have to
5 start doing it', I don't know if they said this to
6 you... 'come on, make up your mind'

7 GUILLERMO: Yes, yes.
8 R: Did they? And then if time goes by, they think
9 you are 'slow' or...? Did that happen to you?
10 G: Yes
11 R: So, that's why I wanted you to tell me about how
12 young boys could manage to start to have sex...
13 G: Well, they would come [from the villages to the
14 city], they would come and, as I said, they would
15 look for a woman... when... you know... later, when
16 it's time, when one is old enough, then... you know,
17 one feels like having a woman, and they used to come
18 and they would look for a woman... we would come,
19 we'd come and look for a woman.
(Guillermo: 2)

The dialogue starts by me trying to get Guillermo to tell me his own story about his first intercourse. In order to do that, I quote other male participants' voices, in the hope that Guillermo will identify with them and feel at ease to tell me about his own experience (1-6). Guillermo accepts he has been through that situation (7) and I then insist about further information by quoting the accusation of **slow** that I had heard from other participants, to which Guillermo seems to relate (8-10). I then ask the question again (11-12) and Guillermo accepts to answer by describing a group activity in which young boys come to the city **to look for a woman** (14-15). He then suggests that we have constructed a shared understanding of the subject by saying **when... you know... later, when it's time** (15-16), maybe because, since I had told him about other men's stories, I would also **know** about this coming of age regarding sexual practice. He then goes on to express precisely that it is only a matter of time that men have the urge to have sex and it is invariably heterosexual - **when one is old enough, then... you know, one feels like having a woman** (16-17)-. Finally, Guillermo goes back to his account of male behaviour and ends the dialogue by including himself as one of the actors of such action, which implies that a negotiation of meaning has occurred between speakers, and that he may be willing now to tell his own story -**and they used to come and they would look**

for a woman... we would come, we'd come and look for a woman (17-18)-.

Alberto, an 18 year old man from rural Guanajuato confirms this construction of male desire as natural and inherent, in which heterosexual intercourse at an early age becomes a necessary rite of passage for the acquisition of a definite male identity¹¹, and it is the proof against the threat of homosexuality, permanently present and in need of ruling out:

- 1 ALBERTO: ... those relations [sexual] are nice, and
2 more than anything... well, you have to live,
3 because if you are going to just be there... without
4 having a girlfriend, without making that relation...
5 you have to do it, you have to... because...
6 RESEARCHER: What would happen if you didn't do it?
7 A: I don't know, sometimes I ask myself 'what would
8 happen?' Well, I think that nothing would happen.
9 R: But, has somebody told you that something can
10 happen? What do they say?
11 A: Well... I don't... nothing happens. Is that
12 right? Isn't it true that nothing happens?
13 R: That's right, nothing happens.
14 A: Then...
15 R: But, what do friends tell you, what do they say
16 could happen if you don't have sex?,
17 A: Well, friends ask me 'well, is it true that you
18 haven't done it?' Well, no, I hadn't then. I mean,
19 they would tease me, that I wasn't good enough for
20 those things, and that I was... that I was
21 different. I said, 'if you want me to prove it to
22 you, I will'. Well, it was then that we went with
23 those women [sex workers]...
24 R: So, part of it was your friends' pressure, [and
25 you did it] so that they would stop saying these
26 things to you?
27 A: No, I mean... friends... I don't please them. I
28 simply go there now, once a month with women like
29 that. I go to the city and I look for women and I go
30 with them.
(Alberto: 1)

Alberto starts this dialogue by emphasizing the pleasurable aspect of sex -**those relations [sexual] are nice** (1)- but he immediately transforms it into an obligation, an unavoidable duty, although he does not specify from whom this order comes nor what are the

¹¹ See chapter V: 3.1. Rituals of male initiation and their transformation.

consequences of not obeying it **-you have to live, because if you are going to just be there... without having a girlfriend, without making that relation... you have to do it, you have to...-** (1-5). Desire here is overcome by an imperative of performance, although the origins and reasons for this are not clear. My next question invites Alberto to try to define what would be the consequences of disobeying (6), to which he answers that he does not know what the threat is about. In fact, he then shares with me the possibility of questioning the consequences of not having sex **-I don't know, sometimes I ask myself 'what would happen?'** (7-8)-.

I then insist that Alberto identifies the impersonal speaker of such threat by asking about concrete persons that might have uttered it (9-10). Alberto does not answer but, rather, asks me the same question he asked himself before **-Isn't it true that nothing happens?** (11-12)-, thus granting me a certain position of knowledge and power in order to silence the abstract threat that he feels. I answer by reassuring him (13), without investigating further about his fears, and closing any possibility to know how he interpreted the threat. This response of mine probably emerged as support for his weak resistance to the threat.

Once this agreement had been reached, I go on asking about the threat and I suggest a concrete speaker: **friends** (15-16). This suggestion might have helped Alberto to precise the source of the imperative, because he then goes on quoting the voices of his friends, who make fun of him when they find out he is still a virgin (17-19). Thus, his lack of sexual experience is a matter of scorn, and he goes on to quote his friends' voices indirectly, who evaluate his membership to the group according to his sexual status **-they would tease me, that I wasn't good enough for those things, and that I was... that I was different** (18-20)-. The **different** nature he is supposed to represent has a lesser value, for he quotes

them saying that he is **not good enough**. However, he does not state what he is **not good enough** for, nor what is the difference about. It is possible that these utterances imply that he is to belong to manhood through intercourse, and that the difference consists of homosexual desires. Homophobia is thus at the basis of this ritual.

This dialogue shows that sexual initiation was a sort of challenge posed to Alberto by his friends, which he had to face if he wanted to belong to such a group. Alberto accepted this challenge and explicitly defied his definition as **different** by hiring the services of sex workers¹². This was the way to prove his masculinity to his peer group -'**if you want me to prove it to you, I will**'. Well, it was then that we went with those women [**sex workers**]... (21-22)-.

In this account, sexual initiation was not the product of desire, but of social pressure. It is not related to what the boy wants, but to what he is supposed to do and be at a certain age, in order to prove that he is indeed a member of the male gender. Thus, intercourse is defined here as a kind of rite of passage that cannot be avoided by those who identify themselves as men. Alberto finishes the dialogue with a contradiction: after I make pressure explicit (23-24) he goes on to deny he acted out of pressure, and he defines this practice as something that became later a desire of his own -'**No, I mean... friends... I don't please them. I simply go there now, once a month with women like that. I go to the city and I look for women and I go with them**' (26-29)-. He thus defends his individuality and independence although a few lines before he accepted his compliance to his friends' challenge. Thus, the cycle of proving manhood is completed by this ritual, especially because Alberto now describes it as if emerged from his own free will.

¹² I will discuss the image of sex workers in chapter V. 3.1. Rituals of male initiation and their transformation.

In this context of meaning, in which **man** is naturally inclined to sex while **woman** is not, it is only logical that he is to introduce her to the sexual encounter. It is only through male desire that woman awakens to her sexual being. There is a difference, however, between young men from urban and rural areas regarding this construction. Not without contradictions, the former seem to be more at ease with the recognition of women as subjects of desire and, sometimes, they try to establish an egalitarian relationship with them in this area. This is the case of Jesús, a 21 year-old university student from Mexico City, who tells about the process that led him and his steady girlfriend to have intercourse:

1 RESEARCHER: ...this idea of suggesting to her to
2 have sex, how did you decide it?, did you want to do
3 it? did you plan to do it?
4 JESUS: Well, the truth is I don't remember clearly,
5 it's not because I'm afraid to say it... but... I
6 remember that it was very spontaneous, either me or
7 her talked about it.
8 R: So you already wanted to...
9 J: It looks like it...
10 R: [laughs]
11 J: I think so [laughs]. And I remember she said that
12 she wanted to give me a proof of her love, and she
13 said 'listen, what would a proof of my love be for
14 you?' but I never said 'give me a proof of your
15 love', or 'have sex with me'. It was her who said...
16 I remember, 'would you be willing to go all the
17 way?' she said, 'to have sex?'. So it wasn't
18 something I set out to get, she was just asking, so
19 I said yes, but not because I wanted to seize the
20 opportunity...
21 R: Do you think she would have felt you were abusing
22 her if you showed interest in having sex with her?
23 J: Well, I don't think so...
24 R: I'm asking because you said 'I hadn't thought
25 about it until she suggested it', maybe she didn't
26 think you were interested...
27 J: ...in having sex?
28 R: ...in having sex, and that it came up as
29 something that she suggested.
30 J: Well, I'm sorry, it wasn't so much her suggestion
31 but rather we both talked about it and maybe...
32 well... I just wanted to feel good with her and I
33 think that's why we decided to do it... and I never
34 showed her too much interest in that.
35 R: Was it because you didn't feel interested or

36 because you didn't want to show it to her?
37 J: Because I didn't want to show it to her.
(Jesús: 1)

This dialogue starts with a question that suggests that first intercourse is the result of a conscious decision and strategy that Jesús would follow **-how did you decide, did you want to do it? did you plan to do it?** (2-3)-. This formulation may imply that I imposed a certain way of defining first sexual relation in accordance to a modern, autonomous concept of the individual that decides and plans his/her actions rationally. In any case, Jesús rejects this definition by stressing the spontaneity of the suggestion right after making clear to me that he feels no fear to talk about sexual matters. This probably in accordance to the kind of modern sexual subjectivity that I had suggested, which implies that sexual desire and practice are not shameful nor sinful **-I remember that it was very spontaneous, either me or her talked about it** (5-7)-

Next, Jesús goes on to describe a dialogue between himself and her girlfriend, in which it is her who suggests to have sex. It is interesting, however, that her voice as quoted by Jesús does so without expressing desire, but obligation, in order to prove a higher feeling: love **-And I remember she said that she wanted to give me a proof of her love, and she said 'listen, what would a proof of my love be for you?'** (11-14)-. Thus, this girl is described by Jesús as an object of his supposed sexual desire. In fact, this dialogue shows that the girl's voice considers that Jesús has a need for sex as a proof of her love, but that she herself does not desire it. Jesús goes on to deny such a need and goes back to describe how she insisted and how he finally agreed **-but I never said 'give me a proof of your love', or 'have sex with me'** (14-15)- However, he makes it clear that he did not **seize the opportunity** (19-20), maybe expressing that the sole interest in sex was

unrespectful of his girlfriend.

I then invite him to explain this utterance by suggesting the concept of **abuse** which would consist of having interest only in sex -**Do you think she would have felt you were abusing her if you showed interest in having sex with her?** (21-22)- . Then there is a small negotiation of meaning between us and, although he denies the idea of abuse, he contradicts his previous expressions, because he apologizes for the way in which he described his girlfriend -**I'm sorry, it wasn't so much her suggestion but rather we both talked about it and maybe...** (30-31)-. Probably, he considered that his portrayal of his girlfriend as an active subject in search for sex was inappropriate. Thus, he converted her suggestion into a negotiation between equals, showing as well that he considered his girlfriend a subject in her own right.

The acceptance of this active image of woman is not the pattern for all participants. Rather, many of them expressed a problematic relationship with an autonomous view of female sexuality. Even though these images shared the prescriptive power of dominant Catholic definitions, they were often contradicted by participants' own experience, forcing them to try to come to terms with such struggle. In this context, women could accept their sexual feelings, but only as a sort of failure to fulfill the culture's ideal model of woman. Gabriela, a 24 year old wife from the indigenous community of Oaxaca, offers a way out of this dilemma between moral prescription and experience:

- 1 RESEARCHER: Did you have another boyfriend before
- 2 [your husband]?
- 3 GABRIELA: Well... yes... why should I say I didn't?
- 4 I'm not made out of stone, or wood. I have feelings,
- 5 don't I?
- 6 R: Sure.
- 7 G: Yes, I had another boyfriend, others... how could
- 8 I say?... other relationships, but nothing more than

9 **noviazgos**¹³, never anything more.
 (Gabriela: 2)

In this excerpt, Gabriela's attempted solution to the dilemma between norm and experience consists of accepting that she has defied the prescription of having only one boyfriend to whom she should marry (3). This confession is followed by a justification in which she seems to disobey some other voice that forbade her to do what she has already done **-why should I say I didn't?** (3)-. Next, she argues for this disobedience by describing herself through a metaphor in which she cannot be an inanimate object -as maybe expected by the norm- and therefore justifies what seems to be the utmost challenge: feeling sexual desire **-I'm not made out of stone, or wood. I have feelings, don't I** (4-5). Still, she needs reassurance from me about this. By answering positively, I thus joined her in her justification of sexual feelings as a universal human asset, whether male or female (6). But she immediately makes it clear to me that to **have feelings** is different than to act upon them through intercourse, therefore making it clear that she did not have any encounter before marriage **-Yes, I had another boyfriend, others... how could I say?... other relationships, but nothing more than noviazgos, never anything more** (7-9)-. It is not clear, however, why Gabriela has to justify her sexual desires, nor why she has to hastily deny to me any sexual activity prior to marriage. Nevertheless, this utterance expresses the existence of two conflicting voices: an impersonal moral command not to want sexual activity, and Gabriela's own voice that expresses her disobedience, justifying it through a supposed human nature that struggles to be expressed and satisfied even against social regulation.

¹³ **Noviazgo** defines a period of courtship generally prior to marriage in which sexual activity, if carried out, it must be secretly.

2.1. The virgin-bride and the whore: a problematic split of the image of women.

In different degrees, but present in all conversations, there is a split of the concept of **woman** in two different images regarding sexuality which, in turn, constitute particular types of bonds with the concept of man. On the one hand, **woman** is not considered a subject of sexual desire and her sexuality is closely tied to reproduction and motherhood. This image does not express any sexual need or eroticism, and her main attributes are tenderness, purity and decency. In her, beauty is related to spirituality, and soul and sublime goodness are what matters. This 'kind' of **woman** is described by participants of both sexes as worthy of marriage and motherhood, which, by the way, would be her main function. With this, she is given the status of a subject, but only regarding reproduction, and not in terms of her own body, needs or desires. She is not autonomous, not a subject in her own right in terms of sexual activity, but a subject of her gendered role as wife and mother. Thus, this image of woman presupposes the lack of erotic and sexual activity before marriage, and even ignorance of it. It offers an image of virginity both bodily and spiritually.

Soledad, a 24 year-old mother from Mexico City, who got married because of her pregnancy, protests against what she considers cultural constraints and inequalities brought about by this enforcement of women's virginity:

- 1 RESEARCHER: How do you explain that this issue of
2 women's virginity is so important and not men's...
3 why...?
4 SOLEDAD: ...do people think that way?
5 R: Yes.
6 S: Well, I feel that... the woman has to be a virgin
7 before the altar, that she is not allowed to be with
8 any... man, and a man is. A man thinks that the more
9 women he has, the more a man he is... but not the
10 woman, if she gets involved with the boy... well...
11 she is not worthy anymore, she is dirty and he will
12 always say to her that he doesn't love her, that he

13 resents her.
14 R: Where do you think these ideas come from?
15 S: Well, I guess they come from our grandparents
16 and... my mom shares that idea still, but... lately
17 she's changed.
18 R: Uh... so she would be dirty... For instance, a
19 girl that has had sex, that takes care of herself
20 [uses contraception] and that is not married, what
21 would be their opinion? What would they say about
22 her?
23 S: That she is crazy and... or if she has children
24 and doesn't have a husband, she is crazy even though
25 she is a decent lady... But she is crazy or she is
26 messing around...
27 R: Messing around?
28 S: ...with other men, and I feel it's not like that.
29 Besides, she has desires of her own... I wouldn't
30 think that about her.
 (Soledad: 1)

The dialogue starts with my question about the reasons why a certain voice defines women's virginity as more important than men's, thus questioning the need for such difference and making my conception of gender equality clear (1-3). Soledad's next utterance defines such a voice as that of the **people** (4), that is, a collective and impersonal speaker. Next, Soledad describes the norm of women's virginity, but she adds a new element: the ritual of marriage before the church, therefore including religious discourse as a major source of the enforcement of such rule and relating female virginity to a sacred dimension¹⁴ -**the woman has to be a virgin before the altar, that she is not allowed to be with any... man** (6-8). She goes on to make a comparison with men's situation, which she considers to be the opposite to that of women, but she makes a link between pre-marital intercourse and reinforcement of male identity that she did not do regarding women -**A man thinks that the more women he has, the more a man he is... but not the woman** (8-10)-. By the subject of the utterance, the **man** does believe that this practice increases his manhood, while **woman** is constrained to

¹⁴ See chapter V, 2.2. **Female virginity as sacred.**

abstinence only by the action of external agents. Soledad thus acknowledges the existence of desire in women but blames **the people** for the impossibility of expressing it. The comparison suggests a certain nuance of injustice in which women are forbidden to do something they want, while men are encouraged to do it.

Soledad then goes on to describe this injustice by mentioning the kind of descriptions that a non-virgin woman might receive **-she is not worthy anymore, she is dirty** (11). **Not worthy** suggests that the value of women is associated to their pre-marital virginity, and **dirty** is related to the notion of sexual activity as pollution¹⁵. If we follow her argument, Soledad then describes how such pollution allows the husband to **resent** his bride from then on **-he will always say to her that he doesn't love her, that he resents her** (11-13)-.

I then changed the direction of the conversation away from the content and toward the origins of these norms, thus making them historic and relative **-Where do you think these ideas come from?** (14)-. Soledad, however, cannot answer such question with total certainty, and the only clues she can find are the differences between generations, since she does not mention religion, the priests or any other formal institution. In any case, her description of her mother's transformation suggests that she does not consider them a fixed reality, but a historical and relative discourse spoken by those who were authorities in other times **-I guess they come from our grandparents and... my mom shares that idea still, but... lately she's changed** (15-17)-.

My answer seems to disregard hers, because I do not continue her argument, but go back to her former utterance and then pose a fictional situation in which a female character pushes the supposed transgression further on: a single woman that engages in sexual

¹⁵ See chapter V: 2.3. Intercourse as pollution, dishonor and shame.

activity using contraception -a girl that has had sex, that takes care of herself [uses contraception] and that is not married, what would be their opinion? What would they say about her? (18-22)-. Soledad then adds a new adjective to such a character: she would be **crazy**. Thus, female sexual desire would be associated to madness according to the voice of the collective, impersonal speaker quoted by her.

But she then contradicts herself: even though Soledad questions the derogatory descriptions that **the people** would make of such a character, she enforces them by using the word **decent** to describe the fictional character. Thus, her whole argument against stigmatization of non-virgin women falls under her alleged defense, because she feels a need to distinguish between **decent** and non-decent women, whom she defines by their sexual activity out of marriage -**That she is crazy and... or if she has children and doesn't have a husband, she is crazy even though she is a decent lady..** (23-25)-. According to this definition, decent women would be those who reproduce within marriage, while indecent women would have sex out of wedlock. For this kind of women, maternity would finally prevent them from carrying on such **crazy** behaviour. Thus, Soledad accepts and defends the idea that women have sexual desires and are entitled to satisfy them, but only within certain limits of decency, that are related to marriage. Only at the end does she go back to defending such entitlement regardless of circumstances -**I feel it's not like that. Besides, she has desires of her own... I wouldn't think that about her** (28-30)-.

This excerpt shows a process of relativization of religious mores regarding female virginity by ascribing such norms to a concrete speaker and then questioning its validity to behave as a judge of others' sexual behaviour. However, there are contradictions in Soledad's account, because she oscillates between granting full

entitlement to women's sexual desires or limiting their satisfaction to institutional arrangements.

Many participants speak of yet another 'kind' of woman that is indeed a subject of desire, exercising seduction towards men and having access to eroticism and pleasure. This female character is described as having had sexual and erotic experiences before marriage, presumably with more than one man. Beauty, in this concept of woman, is related to body sensuality, not to a spiritual quality. However, there is a contradiction in that, even though she is granted a capability for desire and eroticism, her bond to man is defined exclusively as being the object of his desire. She is not considered an autonomous sexual individual in her own right, but rather a responsive counterpart to male sexuality.

An example of a woman that could be classified this way is described by Marta, from the indigenous community of Oaxaca. The fate of such a woman would depend on the possibility that her sexual condition could be known by the community, through the evidence provided by pregnancy out of wedlock :

1 MARTA: Here it is quite common that, if a woman is
2 not a virgin anymore, or unfortunately that her
3 boyfriend let her down or something like that, it is
4 the worst thing that can happen to her.
5 RESEARCHER: What do you mean 'let her down'?
6 M: Well that... if she... got pregnant and
7 everything, and she had to have an abortion, not
8 that I am for abortion, right?, but it happens,
9 right?
10 R: Right.
11 M: Well then, if the boyfriend didn't support her,
12 everyone says she will not have a life again, but I
13 don't agree.
14 R: So, a girl that is not a virgin anymore, she
15 can't get married? she has no value anymore?
16 M: No, not here, but I think that in other places...
17 R: ... it doesn't matter?
18 M: It doesn't matter... or maybe it doesn't matter
19 here either, it depends on what kind of boy he is,
20 because... sometimes even if he is ignorant or
21 whatever you want to call it, when someone loves
22 another person, those things don't matter.

(Marta: 2)

This excerpt is the description of the enforcement of a norm that Marta considers prevalent in the community, which is the preservation of female virginity before marriage and its corresponding disgrace if broken (1-4). However, there is a subtle mention of a way out of this punishment, which depends on the boy's acceptance, although expressed negatively - [if] **unfortunately her boyfriend let her down** (2-3)-. Thus, it is not within the girl's reach to prevent her tragedy; she depends on another person whom she cannot control to prevent further damage.

My next question shows that we did not share the meaning of this utterance, so I ask for further definition of the concept of letting down (5), which Marta agrees to provide. First of all, the situation to which the boy fails to respond is her pregnancy, whatever its outcome may be, which in this case was abortion **-if she... got pregnant and everything, and she had to have an abortion** (6-7). Probably, pregnancy makes the girl's sexual activity evident, exposing her to punishment. But even if an abortion was carried out, her condition could not be made public except if someone told of it. Although Marta does not explain how, it is implied that many people in town would find out about the girl's sexual initiation regardless of her possible pregnancy, and therefore could become her judges. This speaks of a complex and subreptitious system of surveillance that, albeit not described in this excerpt, is present and powerful in Marta's account.

Next, she addresses me to make it clear that she does not approve of abortion, although she acknowledges that it is a frequent phenomenon **-not that I am for abortion, right?, but it happens, right?** (7-9)-. This small rhetoric exchange suggests that Marta needed to state her negative position toward the interruption of pregnancy to me, which may indicate that she considered me opposed to such practice as well. This silent

supposition could also reflect what the participant considers to be dominant discourses on what is right or wrong regarding abortion which are closely related to Catholic mores. In any case, she chooses a sort of secular and scientific position in which the facts are what matters, and not her opinion about them.

Once this is made clear, Marta goes on to explain further the concept of failure, and she makes it the opposite to **support** (11). Although she does not describe the practical meaning of this lack of **support**, she goes on to state its consequences for the girl, and she does so by quoting the voice of **everyone**, maybe to stress the collective consensus of the notion of **support** within her community **-everyone says she will not have a life again** (12). The last phrase **-she will not have a life again-** gives the boy's refusal a meaning of certain death of something which is not specified. After quoting this collective voice, Marta makes it clear that she is an individual by disagreeing with it **-but I don't agree** (12-13).

It is me that suggests a meaning for the **life** the girl would have if the boy did not abandon her, and that is marriage **-So, a girl that is not a virgin anymore, she can't get married?** (14-15)-. Furthermore, I elaborate on this notion by giving an alternative meaning, which is that female virginity is women's only value **-she has no value anymore?** (15)-. Marta supports this definition and, again, renders it relative because of her experience of **other places** (16). I, in turn, finish her sentence suggesting another meaning, which is that, in other places, female virginity **doesn't matter** (17). Marta deepens this relativization by accepting that, even among these judgmental voices, there are exceptions to the rule, but only because of **love -maybe it doesn't matter here either, it depends on what kind of boy he is, because... sometimes even if he is ignorant or whatever you want to call it, when someone loves another person,**

those things don't matter (18-22)-.

Thus, in this excerpt Marta both describes and makes relative the norm of preservation of female virginity before marriage, although she never really questions it. She only states that there is a possibility of redemption thanks to a higher force than social order itself, which is love. The notion of loss of female virginity as a fault is thus not questioned, but only the path to its forgiveness is shown.

Going back to the female stereotypes that these two female images construct, there is a process by which good and evil are ascribed to them: the virgin-mother is, of course, the personification of good, while the sexually active woman who is ultimately considered a whore, represents evil. This rigid classification, although impossible to respond to the diversity of life experience, seems to allow us to organize the forms of expression of female desire and eroticism, as well as the kind of relationships men are to establish with women. Male participants speak of the possibility to choose between these different 'kinds' of women, whom they consider to really exist as different classes, in order to satisfy diverse needs. There is a great difference between the woman they would seek for in order to have sexual intercourse, and the woman they would choose to be their wife and the mother of their children. Amanda, a young married woman from Guanajuato, describes this split clearly by quoting her husband's reasons for choosing her:

- 1 AMANDA: He [her boyfriend] even told me about it
2 [his previous sexual experience] because he... you
3 know how for men it is different... He lived in the
4 United States for a long time and... I guess he had
5 sex with several women, not just one or two.
6 RESEARCHER: Do you know for sure?
7 A: Yes, he told me about it.
8 R: Did he?
9 A: Yes, he told me he went out with two girls there,
10 that he came back because one of them was insisting
11 too much, that she wouldn't leave him alone, so he
12 came back because, he said 'I didn't want to make a

13 commitment, she wasn't the kind of woman I wanted to
14 live with... she wasn't the kind of woman I wanted
15 to share my life with'.
16 R: Did you mind that he wasn't a virgin when you got
17 married?
18 A: No, I would say to myself: 'If I have done it, me
19 being a woman...' how should I say? how could I
20 explain? 'If it happened to me, being a woman, that
21 I am supposed to be more discreet, what could have
22 happened to him being a man!', I thought. I didn't
23 care, even now... even after we got married I asked
24 him: 'did you ever have sex with any of the local
25 girls?', and he didn't want to tell me, and I said,
26 'tell me, I won't get mad', and I insisted because I
27 knew he could reproach me... I insisted until he
28 told me the truth. 'Yes', he said. 'Do I know her?',
29 I asked. 'Yes, you do, she was your friend' and I
30 asked 'so why didn't you marry her?', 'no', he said,
31 'because that woman had a lot of experience¹⁶'. And
32 then 'why did you marry me?', he says, 'because you
33 can tell if the woman, when she... has had more
34 experience... the way she behaves, and the truth is
35 that you were different, different to all the women
36 that I had touched'.
(Amanda: 1)

Amanda starts this dialogue by describing a conversation with her boyfriend in which they discuss his previous sexual experiences. She makes a rhetoric remark by assuming that I know men are different to women in this area **-you know how for men it is different (2-3)-**, and suggesting that the fact of me being a woman like her makes us of the same kind. The homogenizing presence of gender is obvious in this short exchange. In her next utterance, the difference between men and women seems to lie in the greater number of sexual partners that men have before marriage **-I guess he had sex with several women, not just one or two (4-5)-**. This absolute statement about the nature of men is questioned by my next utterance, in which I request proof of her guessing (6). Amanda backs her argument by saying that she is quoting her boyfriend and she then goes on with this

¹⁶ In Spanish Amanda used an expression that speaks of a woman that has been chased around by men: *esa mujer ya estaba más correteada que nada*.

citation, in which his voice speaks about a classification of women: some are eligible only for sex or casual relationships, while others are suitable to share life with, but the criteria for this is not explicit -he said 'I didn't want to make a commitment, she wasn't the kind of woman I wanted to live with... she wasn't the kind of woman I wanted to share my life with' (12-15)-.

My next question assumes that her boyfriend's loss of virginity could be a source of uneasiness for Amanda (16-17) but she denies this possibility. This kind of understanding is explained by the next utterance, which is a justification of her boyfriend's sexual behaviour on the grounds of her own -'If it happened to me, being a woman, that I am supposed to be more discreet, what could have happened to him being a man!', I thought (20-22)-. In this brief sentence, gender explains the boyfriend's behaviour even more so than Amanda's. For her, it is gender that determines differential sexual desire and behaviour for men and women: albeit both are exposed to that urge, women should not feel any sexual desire nor act on its satisfaction while it is in men's essence to do so. Thus, Amanda expected at least this from her boyfriend.

After asking for further detail (23-26), Amanda describes her intention with such questioning: she seemed to want his boyfriend's confession in order to prevent her own punishment for the same behaviour -I insisted because I knew he could reproach me (26-27)-. An ideology of gender equality underlies this defensive strategy, which Amanda pursues by inquiring about the reasons her boyfriend had chosen her for marriage. Again, a classification of women emerges from her quotation of the boyfriend's voice, consisting of the woman's previous sexual experience, which is felt in her behaviour during intercourse -I asked 'so why didn't you marry her?', 'no', he said, 'because that woman had a lot of

experience'. And then 'why did you marry me?', he says, 'because you can tell if the woman, when she... has had more experience... the way she behaves, and the truth is that you were different, different to all the women I had touched' (29-36). Thus, for this couple, the lack of the woman's sexual experience seemed to be one of her main assets in order to be eligible for marriage. However, in this example, it seems that this dominant discourse about women's virginity is bent and twisted as may be convenient for the situation, which is the man's desire to marry Amanda. This way he 'forgives' her previous sexual activity but only because it was not grater than his and does not threaten his masculinity.

Both female images presented so far, that of the virgin-bride and of the whore, which are consistently described both by male and female participants, have considerable prescriptive strength in terms of the definition of femininity, and of its bonds with men, within the communities studied. They are metaphors that convey a whole set of moral values and codes of behaviour regarding sexual practice.

But as much as these images were constant in the conversations, so were stories and discourses that transgressed them, both in male and female participants' accounts. For instance, five out of eight sexually experienced women participants had had intercourse before marriage, four of them not even with their future husbands. These ideal types seem to be more of a normative model than a classification of actual sexual behaviour of women because, in practice, the borders between these two realms seem not to be as rigid. However, the effect of these models in participants' experience is quite powerful because it functions as if in fact it could be possible to split women in such classes: those women who actually accept their sexual desires would hopelessly turn evil, without any possibility to be good again. This would be the case of

the whore, whose main representation is the prostitute, the woman who sells her body and thus pollutes it. No woman would want to be compared to such an image, characterized not only by sensuality but also by corruption, and that is why the experience of mere sexual desire -not always related to love- is so threatening for female participants.

However, according to the construction of male sexuality as powerful, these images serve the purpose of symbolically controlling it, by dividing men's experience into that directed toward reproduction -within marriage- and that which seeks only a temporary pleasure. With the channeling of these two strands of sexual expression, the virgin-bride is preserved from male's polluting desire, while he is still able to act on it with women that are entrusted with such a social role¹⁷.

2.2. Women as subjects of desire: modernity and entitlement.

There seems to be a greater awareness and acceptance of sexual desire among women participants who have had more contact with urban culture and formal education. Amanda and Bertina, two of the participants from Guanajuato who have worked in cities, speak openly about their sexual desire and their erotic capability. But although they have sex, they feel at fault with what they consider to be their feminine nature. The contradiction produced by this clash between Catholic and lay moral values is expressed through a shy acceptance of their sexual being, along with an array of fears, guilt feelings and sensations of betrayal against their families. The most dramatic effect of this situation is that, despite their willingness to have sexual intercourse for the first time, they both decided to lie

¹⁷ For further discussion on the meaning of sex-workers see chapter V: 3.1. **Rituals of male sexual initiation and their transformation.**

to their parents or to their future husbands by saying they had been the victims of forced sex. However striking as it may be, this strategy of self-preservation indicates that this violence is considered as less threatening than the acceptance of female sexual activity outside of institutional arrangements. Amanda, from rural Guanajuato, illustrates how she used this strategy of defense in order to get married to the man she loved:

1 AMANDA: I never told the truth to my husband, I
2 mean, I never told him how it happened. I never told
3 him because I was afraid, right? Because I said to
4 myself: 'if I say it...' well... I told him that it
5 [sex] had happened to me with a boy, but I never
6 told him how, I just told him about it.
7 RESEARCHER: So, did you tell him that you were not a
8 virgin anymore?
9 A: Yes, I did.
10 R: So, what part didn't you tell him?
11 A: Well, I didn't tell him that I had gone
12 voluntarily to the hotel with that boy.
13 R: So, what did you tell him, then?
14 A: I told him that a girlfriend had told me lies...
15 and I said to myself: 'if I tell him it's going to
16 be hell', isn't it? And I love him, I love him a
17 lot. Just imagine how I felt for him at the
18 beginning, I still love him, just imagine how much I
19 loved him before I knew him better. I didn't share
20 my things with him, nor him with me, I was very
21 excited. But I told him, 'you know? if you love
22 me... I'm not a virgin anymore', and... I even had
23 sex with him before I moved in with him, because he
24 accepted me... and I said to him '[I tell you]
25 because I don't want you to get it back at me
26 someday...'
27 R: So you told him it was not voluntary, that it was
28 forced?
29 A: Yes.
30 R: What do you think would have happened if it was
31 voluntary, what would he think or what...?
32 A: Uuuuh!, I think he wouldn't have... he wouldn't
33 have accepted me.
34 R: Really?
35 A: Yes, at least that's what I thought, right?
36 because I never... never tried to tell him the
37 truth. I just thought that it would be like that,
38 period.
 (Amanda: 2)

In this excerpt, Amanda shows her fear of rejection not only for not being a virgin, but for the possibility that she wanted to have sex and acted to satisfy this

desire, as is expressed in the utterance, **I didn't tell him that I had gone voluntarily to the hotel with that boy** (11-12). Next, Amanda describes how, in order to protect the possibility of marriage, she had to lie to her future husband, and she justifies such behaviour through love -**I told him that a girlfriend had told me lies... and I said to myself: 'if I tell him it's going to be hell', isn't it? And I love him, I love him a lot** (14-16). This brief account, which includes an internal dialogue, shows a strategy of resistance that Amanda implements in order to get her way. She is an active subject of her own life, and she achieves this precisely by denying it to her husband.

Amanda then seems to appeal to me in search for understanding of her behaviour by asking me to **imagine** the love she felt for her boyfriend and so to justify her wrong behaviour. This utterance signals an exchange in which she considers me a fellow human being, maybe a fellow woman with whom she can share certain meanings and emotions, particularly **love** for a man -**Just imagine how I felt for him at the beginning, I still love him, just imagine how much I loved him before I knew him better** (16-19)-.

Another expression suggests that her sexual activity before marriage is considered wrong and in need of her boyfriend's forgiveness: **But I told him, 'you know? if you love me... I'm not a virgin anymore', and... I even had sex with him before I moved in with him, because he accepted me** (20-23). It is love, again, the only force that could overcome her fault and it is up to the man to **accept** her or not, as if she was faulty and she needed to warn him that he was getting a defective good, just in case he wanted to cancel the deal -**and I said to him '[I tell you] because I don't want you to get it back at me someday...'** (23-26)-.

Along with Amanda's acceptance of a power relationship supported by gender, another self-defense strategy is

shown in the last quotation offered in Amanda's own voice: she is preventing future bitterness and damage by stating her defects beforehand.

Thus, the loss of virginity did not seem to be as great a fault as long as she did not accept her own desire and sexual feelings, which would have undoubtedly been the cause for rejection, as deduced -but never proved- by her own thoughts about how men are. This is shown by Amanda's answers to my repeated questions (30-31) about the reasons she had for not accepting her own desire -**Uuuuh!, I think he wouldn't have... he wouldn't have accepted me** (32-33)-.

Amanda confessed to herself that she actually enjoyed and wanted sex, a statement that differs from the expression of most of the women from Oaxaca, who were quite clear in expressing their entitlement to education, work and recreational activities, but not to sexual needs and feelings. Most of them did not talk about sexual arousal, let alone masturbation, which actually implies an active pursuit of satisfaction. Even the information regarding female physiology that they had received at school, for instance, was often not assimilated, since some of these women did not even consider themselves the target of such educational programmes.

This massive denial is not the case for the young women from Mexico City, who experience a poignant contradiction because, on the one hand, female sexual desire is considered a reality -mainly validated by modernizing discourses of sexuality promulgated through formal education and the media-but, on the other, women's desire is condemned by deeply rooted Catholic beliefs on femininity. Such a contradiction is evident in the next account, uttered by Patricia a 15 year old secondary school student, from Mexico City:

- 1 RESEARCHER: Would it be important for you to wait
- 2 [to have sex] until you get married?
- 3 PATRICIA: No, I mean, it depends. What if it happens
- 4 before that, before I get married...?
- 5 R: How could it happen? How do you think it would

6 happen?
7 P: It can happen anywhere, it's normal to feel
8 aroused.
9 R: Have you ever felt aroused?
10 P: No.
11 R: Not even by yourself? Even though boys may not be
12 around?
13 P: What do you mean, that I feel strange?
14 R: That you feel aroused.
15 P: Yes, sometimes...
16 R: How do you feel?
17 P: I feel strange, like desperate.
18 R: Desperate? And what do you do?
19 P: Well, nothing. I think about something else or I
20 listen to some music or... if I'm by myself I dance
21 or something...
22 R: Don't you masturbate? Don't you do something like
23 that?
24 P: What do you mean with masturbate?
25 R: Like touching yourself.
26 P: No.
 (Patricia: 1)

This dialogue starts by me asking Patricia about the importance she gives to virginity (1-2), to which she answers that she is open to sexual experience if offered by chance or opportunity **-No, I mean, it depends. What if it happens before that, before I get married...?** (3-4)-. With this she suggests that the final decision of her sexual initiation will depend on the circumstances, more than on her own position toward desire. Her loose view of these issues is supported by her classification of sexual arousal as **normal**, in which the presence of scientific discourse is felt **-It can happen anywhere, it's normal to feel aroused** (7)-.

However, when confronted with my next questions, which intend to see the effects of such discourse in her actual experience **-Have you ever felt aroused?** (8)-, Patricia answers negatively by stating that she has never felt sexually aroused and thus showing a dissociation between her discourse and her bodily sensations and actions, at least as declared to me. My next questions insist on this possibility by suggesting different situations in which such feelings could be experienced (10-11), but Patricia does not seem to understand this

and offers an alternative meaning to feeling **aroused**: to feel **strange** (12). The choice of such adjective is interesting because it indicates precisely the opposite of **normal**, that is, an estrangement of sexual desire.

I refuse to accept such a definition and insist on imposing my own term, therefore showing we could not really reach a shared meaning of feeling **aroused** (13). However, Patricia finally accepts my definition and admits to feeling aroused **sometimes** (14). The difficulty the participant showed throughout this exchange contradicts her definition of sexual arousal as **normal**, for she did not express it freely to me in the conversation.

I insist on asking for further detail of her experience of arousal (15), and she answers with her original definition of excitement as something **strange** (16), but she now adds a new meaning: **desperate**, which indicates a certain uneasiness. Inquired about her actions toward this feeling (17), Patricia describes a series of behaviours that intend to eliminate it, rather than to satisfy it, thus indicating that sexual satisfaction is something she does not consider even when aroused -**Well, nothing. I think about something else or I listen to some music or... if I'm by myself I dance or something...** (18-20)-. This strategy of distraction versus satisfaction, again, is opposed to her definition of arousal as **normal**.

My next question seems to intend to force Patricia to describe how she feels about an active pursuit of sexual satisfaction through masturbation or any other activity (21-22). Again, Patricia shows that she does not share the meaning of masturbation, probably not because she does not know the word, but because admitting that she did would put her in an awkward situation; she would have to answer such a direct question. I acknowledge her confusion by offering an alternative meaning -**Like touching yourself** (24)- but I never mention genital

manipulation. Patricia's answer is consistent with her denial of any sexual practice.

This dialogue is an example of the confusing effect that present competing discourses of sexuality may have upon the experience of young women like Patricia, who seem to incorporate scientific and modern discourses rationally, while still embodying a Catholic morality regarding femaleness.

In the last section I have showed several examples of how some of the women participants constructed the meaning of desire and sexual activity based upon gender considerations. The construction of two opposite images of women according to these issues has been illustrated by these accounts, where norms and prescriptions are expressed, along with transgressions and contradictions.

But, although all of the participants share this classification, its validity is questioned by some of the men who have refused to follow the prescription of splitting women into these two types and establishing different relationships with them; these are the men who have tried to link affection to sexual desire.

Consequent with a more integrated image of woman as a total being, promoted by modernity's ideal of the individual as a whole entity, younger male participants, whether from rural or urban settings, spoke of their intention of waiting to have their first intercourse with a girl they could look upon as an equal, even in sexual terms (five of the twelve male participants had their first intercourse with their steady girlfriends at the time). This is the case in the next excerpt, which comes from a conversation with Fernando and Carlos, 18 year old students from the indigenous town in Oaxaca, who talked to me jointly:

- 1 RESEARCHER: You haven't started your sexual life...
- 2 I suppose not because you don't want to...
- 3 CARLOS: Of course we want to have sex [laughs].
- 4 There are men that go to certain places in the city
- 5 and some of them don't take any precautions. But
- 6 there are so many diseases that I better take care

7 of myself.
8 FERNANDO: I better have patience.
9 C: It's better to wait...
10 F: ... to get older...
11 C: Or... if you have your girlfriend you can do it,
12 but they both have to agree. I think it's better to
13 do it with your girlfriend than to go there.
14 R: Why?
15 C: Apart from the fact that you love your
16 girlfriend, I think it's better. Besides, there you
17 have to pay, they've told me you have to pay 50,
18 200, 300... [pesos].
19 F: It depends on what you want.
(Carlos and Fernando: 1)

In this excerpt, my first question suggests that there is a shared meaning between the participants and myself, in terms of taking their sexual desire for granted, as if it were a part of an essential masculinity **-I suppose not because you don't want to... (1-2)-**. This utterance is itself a demand for explanation about their supposed sexual restraint.

Carlos' answer confirms there is an agreement between us regarding their construction of male sexuality, and then he goes on to explain the circumstances in which certain men have their sexual initiation (3). However, he does not use any precise word to describe the settings of this initiation and only suggests that I know what kind of places he is referring to **-There are men that go to certain places in the city (3-4)-**. The silence regarding such places suggests that they are unmentionable, at least during this conversation, although they can be implied.

The reason Carlos argues for not going to a place like this are the health risks that he associates with such practice. This suggests that he is informed both about coitus and about possible precautions against its hazards, although he does not specify what they are **-some of them don't take any precautions (4-5)-**. In fact, his next expression defines such places as a locus of infection that is better to stay away from **-But there are so many diseases that I better take care of myself (5-7)**.

His companion completes the argument in favour of abstinence as protection from disease, through the notion of **patience** (8), which implies there is a sexual need or desire that is not possible to satisfy for the time being. So, it seems that time and maturity themselves protect from the dangers of sexual initiation, although none of the participants explains why (9-10).

Carlos then shifts the argument toward the kind of sexual partner with which they could have first intercourse and considers that **a girlfriend** is a better option than the places mentioned above **-if you have your girlfriend you can do it** (11)-. Then, the **girlfriend** is granted a status of equality and individuality in terms of sexual desire and decision, because Carlos clearly states the partners need **to agree** (12).

The reasons for preferring a girlfriend are then explained as related to health, although it is not mentioned. **Love** and the fact that it would be free of charge also count as motives (15-18). The latter is the only element in the whole conversation that suggests that **certain places** are in fact brothels. Thus, emotional, health and economic reasons seem to support these participants' decision of waiting to start their sexual activity with a girlfriend. Whether true or not, the ideas conveyed by these young men may be an indicator of the effects of modernity upon the sexual behaviour of young people, both in terms of granting women the entitlement to their sexual desire, and in terms of the knowledge of exposure to health risks related to casual intercourse.

The examples presented in this section intended to show the contradictions and mixtures of certain images of female sexuality that participants resorted to as a classification of women according to their expressions of sexual desire. The coexistence of these images that come from different moral codes pose diverse dilemmas and difficulties for young population in Mexican culture

nowadays. The participants of this study described several aspects of their struggle to come to terms with the transformation of what was a traditional gendered sexuality that is now including cultural elements that favour individualism and autonomy, thus questioning the power differential between genders. This change, however, does not happen in an evolutionary direction from gender asymmetry towards gender equality. Rather, participants' discourse is populated by gaps, confrontations and uncertainties that they have to deal with in order to construct their identity in a fast-changing culture.

3. To know about sex: men, women, eroticism and information

One of the main indicators of what participants considered to be subjects of desire was the notion of 'knowledge' about sexuality. This was a consistent category throughout all conversations, whether with men or women, whether in rural or urban areas, and it proved to be an important metaphor in the production of images of female and male sexual activity.

The concept of sexual knowledge seemed to include two different kinds of knowledge that relate to each other -sometimes in a contradictory manner- and that, in turn, determine certain images of subjects of sexual desire. On the one hand, participants spoke of knowledge based on scientific discourse, mainly on reproductive anatomy and physiology, that is taught in the context of formal education and sometimes disseminated by the media. However, as described by them, it rarely included any information about actual sexual intercourse. This knowledge is rational and informational, separated completely from the body and its sensations, and it is considered gender neutral. Any young person that goes to public school can and should have it, for it is an indicator of one's own inclusion in modern life. As

García Canclini asks himself:

How can we explain that many of the changes in thought and taste of urban life coincide with those of the peasantry, if it is not because its interactions with the cities and the reception of electronic media in rural households connects them on a daily basis to modern innovations? (García Canclini 1990:265*)

Whether a man or a woman, to possess this knowledge is not considered a moral fault, but rather, it is the proof of one's participation in cultural progress.

On the other hand, there is a consistent image - among both male and female participants- of a kind of sexual knowledge that is embodied, sensual and practical. It refers to the knowledge of the body regarding desire and eroticism. It is also expressed through the body, rather than through verbal language. The moral evaluation of this knowledge depends on who possesses it. In the case of men, it is expected from them to have it, almost as a necessary element for the assertion of their gender identity. In contrast, if it is a woman who displays mastery and skill during sexual intercourse, she is immediately evaluated as 'experienced', which means that she has had more than one sexual partner and that she has, therefore, a dubious moral reputation. She would not be, according to this norm, worthy of marriage and family life.

One of the most dramatic expressions of this image of women's alienation from desire was spoken by Claudia, a 30 year old woman from Oaxaca, who ascribed to the female body a sort of natural rejection of sexual activity:

- 1 RESEARCHER: Did you feel that something in your body
2 changed [after intercourse]?
3 CLAUDIA: Yes, one changes, because when one has
4 sex... me, for instance, I was a little heavier and
5 I lost weight... I was a bit heavier and after a few
6 months I lost a little weight.
7 R: Does that mean that it was good for you?
8 C: I guess not, because they say that when one gains
9 weight it means it's fine, and when one loses weight
10 it's not OK, I mean, that the body does not accept
11 that, do you understand?

12 R: I see, that's what they said, that if the body
13 loses weight it doesn't accept sexuality.
14 C: Right.
15 R: And, what do you think about that?
16 C: Well, that I didn't accept it well.
17 R: You didn't?
18 C: Well, no, because instead of gaining weight I
19 lost weight, I mean... I was heavier... but I've
20 recovered little by little.
21 R: And what did your husband say about you losing
22 weight?
23 C: He didn't say anything.
24 R: Who did?
25 C: Well... friends, they saw me with my friends or
26 my parents and they would ask what was happening to
27 me, and I... I think it must be that, isn't it?
28 R: That your body didn't accept it.
29 C: Right, the body does not accept that.
30 R: And why are you recovering now?
31 C: Because... I have a family now, I am a mother,
32 and that helps a lot...
33 R: Right, so you're getting stronger of course.
34 C: And my hands are also better. I didn't have
35 healthy hands anymore.
36 R: Because of pregnancies?
37 C: Because of pregnancies or maybe because of so
38 much sex I used to have.
39 R: Is it less now?
40 C: Yes, it is.
41 R: Because you asked for it or it just happened?
42 C: Now it's only now and then...
(Claudia: 1)

In this excerpt, Claudia defines sexual activity as harmful to her according to criteria of weight loss after initiation - **I was a bit heavier and after a few months I lost a little weight** (5-6)-. My next question evidences that I did not share this criteria, because I considered this weight loss a good development for Claudia's body, probably according to an American, middle-class white model of beauty. But she rejected such definition by explaining the negative effects of sex on a woman's body, through the voice of a collective impersonal speaker which could be the members of the community that express and hold this knowledge -**they say that when one gains weight it means it's fine, and when one loses weight it's not OK** (8-10)-.

Claudia goes on to explain the reason for such harm,

which is the rejection of sexual practice by the body, an idea that suggests that female physiology should not include sexual desire, or that its practice could produce ill health **-the body does not accept that, do you understand?** (10-11)-. The lack of a shared meaning is suggested by Claudia's question to me, which also implies that she does not consider me a member of her community's collective pool of meanings.

My next utterance only confirms that I have understood, but this time I define sex as **sexuality** (13), which is a concept that the participant had not used, although she accepts it (14). In an attempt to elicit her voice, I ask her to tell her thoughts about this conception of sex as harmful, and she answers by blending herself totally with the collective speaker **-Well, that I didn't accept it well** (16). Claudia then tells about how the damage produced by her initial sexual activity was overcome by recovery over time (19-20), but I insist on asking her to make explicit the voices that spoke such diagnose. At first, I supposed they were represented by her husband, but I was wrong, because such voices came from her peer group **-friends, they saw me with my friends or my parents and they would ask what was happening to me** (25-26)-. Claudia then goes on, not without a certain hesitation, to assert that sex was the cause of her loss of weight, but this time she asks for confirmation from me, but I refuse to do so posing a new question (27-29).

I ask her for the reasons of her recovery over time, and she responds with a construction of the healing power of reproduction and motherhood, which would show their benefits through weight gain **-I have a family now, I am a mother, and that helps a lot** (31-32). Thus, following Claudia's argument, sexual activity is harmful for a woman, and only motherhood is capable of repairing such damage. This conception of female sexuality reinforces the image of women as not being subjects of sexual desire and practice, but of reproduction, and such is precisely

the image of the virgin-mother.

Later in the conversation, Claudia ascribes the opposite meaning to the male body, because it would always have the urge to carry out sexual activity, as it would be essentially inclined to sexual desire and practice, important assets for men's well-being and physical growth:

1 RESEARCHER: Do you know when your husband lost his
2 virginity?
3 CLAUDIA: No, not really.
4 R: You don't?
5 C: No, he's never told me.
6 R: Do you think he was a virgin when you got
7 married?
8 C: What do you mean?
9 R: I mean... did he get married being a virgin, like
10 you? or do you think he had had sex before?
11 C: Oh, yes! Men nowadays... uhf! They can have sex
12 anywhere, they don't wait. They start when they are
13 15, and they can do it with anyone.
14 R: So, do you think your husband waited? What do you
15 think about that?
16 C: Well, I think it was necessary, right?, in order
17 for the man to grow up, because, sometimes if they
18 don't have sex by the age of 15, they get sick...
19 R: Of what?
20 C: Well, they are in a bad mood, or maybe they use
21 it as an excuse, that they have headaches and they
22 need sex.
(Claudia: 2)

In this excerpt, Claudia does not consider it important to know about her husband's status of virginity before they got married (1-10). This shows a different treatment of women's and men's sexuality, in which women themselves participate. Moreover, even though Claudia says that she did not ask her husband about his sexual activity before marriage, she expresses absolute certainty that it has occurred, and she includes him in a broad category of **men** who, according to her description, display a common pattern of sexual behaviour -**Men nowadays... uhf! They can have sex anywhere, they don't wait** (11-12)-. This pattern consists of early sexual initiation regardless of the place and partner -**They start when they are 15 and they can do it with anyone**

(12-13)-.

My next question inquires about Claudia's opinion about her husband's behaviour (14-15). Her answer is an explanation of such behaviour, grounded in men's supposed biological characteristics. Thus, for Claudia, sex at an early age (around 15) is a necessary step for the healthy growth of men. This argument is similar to what other participants expressed in terms of sexual practice as evolutionary¹⁸, but it goes further by saying that its absence could harm the man's well-being -**I think it was necessary, right?, in order for the man to grow up, because, sometimes if they don't have sex by the age of 15, they get sick...** (16-18)-. Next, Claudia describes the kind of discomforts that the lack of sexual activity would produce, but she ends by expressing doubts about the truthfulness of such statement and considers that it is only a strategy that men use in order to get sex -**maybe they use it as an excuse, that they have headaches and they need sex** (20-22)-. In any case, Claudia grants men an essential need for sexual practice and knowledge that women would not and should not have.

Previous excerpts like these show that participants, both male and female, construct an asymmetry of the knowledge a man and a woman should have when their first intercourse occurs: while a man is expected to have sexual experience before marriage, and therefore to know how to move and what to do with his partner, a woman is not to be actively engaged in the pursuit of erotic pleasure, or else she will endanger her possibilities of marriage. The lack of knowledge about sexual practice itself is an indicator of virginity, which, at least in discursive terms, is a condition for a woman to get a husband and a family. To prove it, she has to behave as completely ignorant of any sexual activity and pleasure; even pain serves as evidence of her purity.

¹⁸ See excerpt Guillermo: 1.

3.1. Alternative stories and experiences of resistance.

However, within the conversations there were several accounts of resistance to this prescription, namely the fact that many of the women participants had had their sexual debut with partners other than their future husbands, and also that there are expressions of forgiveness or acceptance of their male sexual partners on account of their love.

In the next excerpt Saúl, a 28-year-old construction worker from Guanajuato, describes the contradiction of feeling both disappointed of his first intercourse with his wife, as well as satisfied with finding her ignorant in sensual terms:

- 1 RESEARCHER: How did you imagine it [his first
2 intercourse with his wife] would be? Was it like you
3 imagined it would be?
4 SAUL: No, not at all.
5 R: How did you imagine it would be?
6 S: Well... I thought it would be nice, I thought it
7 would be nice... quiet and all that.
8 R: Quiet?
9 S: Yes.
10 R: And what else?
11 S: Well, I thought that... it would be like in the
12 movies and the magazines, that you go to heaven and
13 all that, very nice.
14 R: And it wasn't like that?
15 S: No, it wasn't like that. I mean, for instance, my
16 wife said she was still a virgin and I didn't like
17 it at all the first time. I didn't like it at all.
18 R: Really? Did your wife tell you?
19 S: Yes, I didn't like it at all. She even said she
20 was scared. Well, one can sense it, right? One
21 doesn't say anything... the fact that they say these
22 things to you... maybe they are scared or something,
23 then it means that maybe they really were virgins.
24 Or that she's a virgin... maybe it is because she's
25 ignorant or maybe because of the way she felt...
26 maybe she is [a virgin].
27 R: She was scared of course.
28 S: If she was a virgin, right?
29 R: Was it important for you that she was a virgin?
30 S: Well... she gave me love, she gave me affection,
31 it wasn't important for me whether she was a virgin
32 or not, all I wanted was to get married, to get a

33 partner and be OK, I didn't care if she was a virgin
34 or not.
35 R: You didn't care?
36 S: No. I could have married her or any other, I
37 wanted to have a family. On the contrary, I wanted
38 the love of a partner, that's what I wanted, I
39 didn't care.
(Saúl: 3)

In this dialogue Saúl tells the story of his first intercourse with his wife, in which she stated her virginity and expressed fear. But her confession did not seem to be enough because she had to back it up with certain behaviours and emotions that constituted evidence. Saúl considered that her fear was derived from her **ignorance** of sex, and both fear and lack of knowledge were considered proofs of her virginity by him (19-26).

Just like Claudia does with men in the previous excerpt¹⁹, Saúl includes his wife in a generic category of women which prescribes certain characteristics that allow for classification of particular individuals **-they say these things to you** (21-22)-.

I then express a certain understanding of what Saúl considered his wife's fear of sex **-She was scared of course** (27)- but he asks for further confirmation that fear is a proof of virginity **-If she was a virgin, right?** (28)-. This last request could mean that Saúl considers me a member of the generic category of women, and that I may therefore know about such feelings and their origin, confirming his perception of his wife. I refuse to confirm this hypothesis by asking yet another question, this time in terms of the meaning virginity had for Saúl (29). Until then, all we had discussed were evidences of facts, but not the importance they could have for Saúl or for his wife. His answer constitutes a higher level of comprehension, because although he could recognize the evidences of virginity, he says he did not consider it important. Marriage, **family** and **love** are mentioned by

¹⁹ See excerpt Claudia: 2.

Saúl as his main goals, which were not hindered by his wife's possible loss of virginity. Thus, as discussed before, love and the desire for a family are, for Saúl, superior forces that can question the power of norms regarding women's sexuality **-she gave me love, she gave me affection, it wasn't important for me whether she was a virgin or not, all I wanted was to get married** (30-32).

A similar story was told by Amanda, who could describe her previous sexual experience to her future husband, although she hid her own desire in order to be forgiven and marry him. In the next excerpt, she recalls a dialogue with her boyfriend after their first intercourse, in which she was afraid he could detect her non-virginity and could reject her as his future wife:

1 RESEARCHER: How was it that you got married? How did
2 you agree on it?
3 AMANDA: Well, once that he came to visit me, I just
4 left with him, I asked him to take me with him, and
5 he said 'OK, I'll take you home, but my sister is
6 there, my mom is there also'. So we went and we had
7 sex and we came back and then he told me that he had
8 sex before and he... he didn't notice any difference
9 in me... I don't know if... if he noticed or felt
10 any difference or if he just didn't want to offend
11 me. He said 'you've had sex with another man
12 before', and I told him... but I never told him what
13 really happened, but I said yes, and I asked 'what
14 do you think of me now?', 'nothing', he said. 'What
15 do you mean, nothing?', I said, 'you have to think
16 something of me now!'. And he said, 'no, have you
17 had sex only with one man?' and I said, 'to tell you
18 the truth, yes'. And he was quiet and thinking...
19 and I asked 'is this going to change things between
20 us?' and he said 'no, why should it?'... he was so
21 calm! So I asked, 'don't you care?', 'no', he said.
22 R: Was that a surprise for you?
23 A: Oh yes! It was a relief!
24 R: Was it?
25 A: Oh yes! I said to myself, 'uhf! he didn't reject
26 me...'
(Amanda: 3)

In this excerpt Amanda considers that her boyfriend could supposedly detect her virginity during their first intercourse through the bodily sensations of her vagina and through observing her behaviour during the encounter. His experience with other women is never questioned, but

rather taken for granted as an element of knowledge that allowed him to evaluate her sexual status -**I don't know if... if he noticed or felt any difference** (8-9)-.

For both of them to mention that she had had sex already was considered a sort of insult against her dignity, thus showing that women's sexual knowledge and experience is undesirable at the least -**or if he just didn't want to offend me** (10)-.

Next, Amanda reproduces a dialogue between her and her boyfriend in which he asks about and she confesses to her previous sexual intercourse (10-12). Her quotation of her own voice expresses a certainty that this confession is to have consequences in terms of her boyfriend's concept of her and of their relationship. But the absence of such consequences is questioned by her, as if she could not believe it -**and I asked 'what do you think of me now?', 'nothing', he said. 'What do you mean, nothing?', I said, 'you have to think something of me now!'** (13-15). This brief polyphony could suggest that Amanda expected a punishment for her sexual behaviour, giving her boyfriend the power to reject her and to decide upon their future relationship. This is the reason why his acceptance came as a **surprise** and a **relief** to her (21-22). Summarizing, because of her sexual experience, in this account Amanda does not construct herself as an agent of her own life, but as a passive object of the man's decision who, in turn, forgives her and overlooks the transgression that she had done.

The examples offered above demonstrate a cultural construction in which the fact that a woman expresses embodied knowledge about sexual activity is considered by members of both sexes as a fault, although some men tolerate this as long as it does not threaten their superiority in terms of sexual knowledge, in which case they can 'forgive' the woman. Other participants go even as far as questioning this belief through the discourse

of modern gender equality that permeates their approach to heterosexual relationships.

3.2. The effects of scientific knowledge upon sexual experience.

Two discourses -Catholicism and science- seem to exert considerable pressure on the young population regarding the meaning of sexual activity. While religious mores forbid women to know and experience bodily pleasure and push men to reject any woman that does not fit this description, this same population is nowadays exposed to the status of scientific discourse and family planning programmes, that prescribe exactly the opposite, that is, to be informed about sexuality and reproduction. These two normative trends are often opposed to each other through the institutions that represent them.

It is common in participants' accounts to find tensions between families and school, for instance, because the former are considered to neglect and deny children's attempts to get information about sexuality, while the latter intrudes against this silence with its educational function, often putting parents in a difficult situation. Apart from moral considerations, one of the difficulties that were mentioned against the family as a formative agent of an informed sexual activity is the parents' lack of information, who seem to be left behind by the new generations in terms of formal education. The need to silence sexuality within the family is illustrated by Claudia, from Oaxaca, in the next excerpt:

- 1 RESEARCHER: Please tell me if I'm intruding, but I'd
- 2 like to know if there was somebody when you were
- 3 young... if there was an opportunity to talk to
- 4 somebody about the changes in your body?
- 5 CLAUDIA: You mean my physical development? Well, at
- 6 school they would tell us about it... that you grow
- 7 up, that your breasts grow and... your hips grow and
- 8 there are changes... also when menstruation arrives.
- 9 R: Did they tell you about it at school?

10 C: Yes.
11 R: Not at home?
12 C: No, not at home, because my parents were... how
13 could I say?... my mom was a little illiterate, she
14 was afraid to know about that, but one goes to
15 school and understands many things. That's why I
16 realized... because my mom never told me that it was
17 going to happen to me. She should have warned me, I
18 guess, once one realizes that daughters are
19 changing.
20 R: You mean they didn't dare to tell you?
21 C: No.
22 R: Why, do you think?
23 C: I guess because of shame, right? They are shy...
24 to trust their sons and daughters...
25 R: What do you think they feel? What could happen if
26 they told their sons and daughters?
27 C: That they are teaching them about things they
28 shouldn't know, I suppose.
29 R: Right, as if they were opening their eyes or
30 something like that.
31 C: Yes, they open their eyes and for them it is a
32 bad thing
33 R: Uhm, like shameful?
34 C: Shameful, and they shouldn't... it's like they
35 are putting ideas in children's minds that they
36 shouldn't know about. But I think they were wrong,
37 because now you can see... now everybody knows about
38 everything, children know about everything, children
39 can't be fooled anymore.
(Claudia: 3)

When asked about the social agents that informed Claudia about her bodily changes during puberty, she answers by quoting the voice of science and describing this process as **my physical development** (5), and next she quotes the voice of formal education telling her about sexual secondary characters and menstruation (5-8). Thus, school and scientific discourse appear closely linked to each other and, for Claudia, were the main sources of information about the issue.

I then ask about the educational function of the family, to which she answers negatively and goes on to explain the reasons why her parents, whom she considers should be the main source of information, did not help her when needed. According to Claudia, there were two reasons for this neglect: the mother's lack of studies, and fear **-my mom was a little illiterate, she was afraid**

to know about that (13-14).

Several considerations can be derived from these lines. First, Claudia shifts the supposed source of information from the **parents** to the **mother**, maybe implying that education on bodily and sexual matters should be discussed only with same-sex parents. Second, that scientific discourse is, for Claudia, the only reliable knowledge about sexual development. Third, that to know about these matters was a sort of threat to her mother, although she does not explain why.

Her account seems to describe a present social situation in which children surpass parents in terms of education because of the expansion of public schools, as indicated by the use of **one** instead of **I**, which means Claudia considers herself part of a group **-but one goes to school and understands many things** (14-15). In this utterance, school attendance undermines the **fear** of knowing about sexual matters, which could mean that science is considered by Claudia as an element of progress against the superstition and silence with which religion has surrounded these matters.

Claudia goes on by telling about how she came to know through school, and expresses some regret that her mother did not fulfill that informational function, therefore showing that she expected her to do it **-That's why I realized... because my mom never told me that it was going to happen to me. She should have warned me, I guess** (15-17)- By changing the subject to **one** and speaking of herself as a mother, Claudia hastily asserts that she does not intend to do the same with her own daughters **-once one realizes that daughters are changing** (18-19)-.

I then seem to be interested in the **fear** of knowledge because I ask again and transform her mother's feeling into a difficulty of daring **to tell** Claudia about sexual development (20). She accepts such definition and offers now a different explanation, this time not linked

to information, but to **shame**, shyness and **trust**, that is, to moral considerations that seem to discourage the discussion of sexual matters between children and parents (23-24). I then ask Claudia to explain this danger further in terms of the parents' fear of the effects of information on their children **-What could happen if they told their sons and daughters?** (25-26)-. She hesitantly quotes her parents' voice about their reasons for not teaching the young, which are the need for preventing them to know about **things they shouldn't know** (27-28). Therefore, sexual matters are something that children have to remain ignorant about, and my expression **they open their eyes** (29-30) suggests that children already have within their nature something -sex- that could be available to them, but that needs to remain hidden because it is considered **bad**. Then I offer **shameful** (33) as an alternative meaning to **bad**, probably based on Claudia's previous expression, and she accepts such definition quoting her parents' voice again, in terms of their preoccupation for awakening in their children an undesirable force that they should not be aware of, at least at an early age **-it's like they are putting ideas in the children's minds that they shouldn't know about** (34-36)-.

Claudia ends this dialogue by expressing her own rejection of her parents' ideas which, by the way, were expressed by her as if they were true of all parents. This rejection is based, according to her utterance, in the fact that they do not match present times in which information about sex circulates all around children, who know much better than their parents and will not accept concealment and silence **-But I think they were wrong, because now you can see... now everybody knows about everything, children know about everything, children can't be fooled anymore** (36-39). With this final utterance, Claudia expresses her own voice as a modern one that opposes traditional ways of dealing with sexual

education within the family.

One of the possible interpretations of this dialogue is that, in this context, for parents to talk about sexuality is to foster its performance, and therefore talk needs to be regulated in terms of who, when and where to speak about it. Out of school, where girls and boys share the same information given by teachers and educators, many participants described a system of rigid gender division regarding discourse about sexuality; it is not considered appropriate to have conversations about it with persons of a different sex.

So, to talk about sex, the body or eroticism, even with a partner, requires that both share a certain moral code. As seen before, while the woman is not supposed to know or to ask, the man is to teach her about sexual activity, but not through verbal language. The prescription of this gendered division is particularly rigid in the rural communities of this study (Oaxaca and Guanajuato), which was implied in the fact that some of these participants regard conversations about sexuality as a possible offense to women they respect. This is illustrated by the next dialogue with José, a 21-year-old student from Oaxaca who travels everyday to his school in the capital of the city:

- 1 RESEARCHER: How would you say that local girls have
2 their first intercourse?
3 JOSE: Well, I really couldn't answer that question
4 because, as I said, I don't really know the local
5 girls, right? I've had friends but... but I don't
6 talk to them about sex because... well... it makes
7 me uncomfortable even though we're tough with each
8 other, I haven't gone to the extreme of talking to
9 them about sex... I feel... maybe they would feel
10 offended if I... If they don't understand what I
11 want to say.
12 R: You could even lose them?
13 J: Well, no, I'm not afraid to lose them but to
14 offend them and to feel bad about it, because nobody
15 can understand me if I want to talk with them about
16 that.
17 R: Uhm, that your intention is not to do it with
18 them but to...
19 J: It's not that, but only to talk about sex, to get
20 to know them.

21 R: Sure, and it must be difficult if you have such
22 questions...
23 J: Well, yes. They would feel offended because maybe
24 at home they never talked to them about that or
25 maybe they did.... and most of my friends have
26 finished secondary school or sometimes they haven't
27 finished it, some of them haven't finished it...
28 R: And you think that's important in order to talk
29 about these issues?
30 J: Yes, because a child that finishes elementary
31 school, well, they only have a few pages about
32 reproductive systems and there are girls that
33 finished their elementary school long ago... but at
34 my level of studies it's very different. To talk
35 about sex is normal, even in high school, the
36 biology teacher tells you about it and he says
37 things openly. But here, if you tell a girl about
38 it, a girl that just finished elementary school,
39 then you're going to offend her and you are going to
40 feel uncomfortable because you can't explain to her
41 or maybe she can't understand you.
42 R: You can be misunderstood?
43 J: Yes, if you want to talk to them about sex... I
44 can't explain really...
45 R: Does it happen with the girls in Oaxaca [the
46 capital city] as well?
47 J: Well, yes. In Oaxaca they've been my classmates
48 and... well... to talk about it is to offend her
49 because the teacher talks and you laugh and he asks
50 'why are you laughing? this is your body. This is
51 our body', right? But here it is very different.
52 R: What do local girls think about the body?
53 J: Well, here women have not... they have not had
54 experience... I haven't talked to them because if I
55 did, they would have told me.
56 R: The only thing you know is that you can't talk
57 about it?
58 J: Yes, that I'm sure of, because I can offend them
59 and feel uncomfortable myself because nobody can
60 understand what I want and how far I want to go
61 talking about sex, right? I don't mean to say 'let's
62 have sex' but...
63 R: ... you just want to talk about it.
64 J: I just want to talk about it.
(José: 1)

In this account, José discusses the meaning of talking with women about sex, because for him it does not seem harmless -I don't talk to them [girlfriends] about sex (5-6). The reasons for this are then explained. First of all, he speaks of a feeling of uneasiness on his part and constructs the subject of sex as maybe the most difficult area of gender relationships. For José, sex is

a subject that is not to be discussed even within what he calls **tough** relationships, because it is an **extreme -it makes me uncomfortable even though we're tough with each other, I haven't gone to the extreme of talking to them about sex** (6-9)-. He then argues about two possible risks in talking about sex with women. First, he could offend them, which could mean that the subject itself is derogatory and that he, being a sensitive man, would not submit a woman to such treatment **-maybe they would feel offended** (9-10)-. The second danger is to be misunderstood, although he does not specify what this means **-If they don't understand what I want to say** (10-11)-.

My next questions invite him to explain this risk further, first suggesting that the outrage would be so, that he could lose their friendship **-You could even lose them?** (12)- and then offering another meaning, which is that the danger of misunderstanding is that, by talking about sex with a woman, she would think that he had the **intention** to have intercourse with her (17-18). José accepts my definition and again justifies his interest in just to **talk about sex, to get to know them** (19-20). In any case, this brief rhetoric exchange could indicate that to talk about sex, let alone the intention to have it, is offensive for women. This is, again, a denial of them as subjects of desire.

José then explains that he does not share such idea, although he has to respect those who hold it, thus constructing himself as a critical but respectful subject of others' views of the world. He considers himself different to them **-They would feel offended because maybe at home they never talked to them about that** (23-24)-.

It is interesting that he then makes that difference lie upon the level of formal education that people have, thus showing that this is a crucial element in the possibility of talking about sexuality and considering there is no need to silence it **-most of my friends have**

finished secondary school or sometimes they haven't finished it (25-26)-. This utterance could be thought of as an example of the effects that the secularization of sexuality is having in the concrete experience of subjects.

Next, I ask José to amplify on the importance he gives to education and he answers by ascribing a liberating effect to scientific information and to the open environment provided within schools, that encourages to talk about the body and about sex; an environment that seems to be opposed to that of the students' homes. This opening to discourse about sexuality increases, according to José, with the degree of education, therefore making it difficult to talk about it for people that have not finished, for instance, secondary school (30-37).

This explanation constructs scientific knowledge about the physiology of sex and reproduction as a precondition for accepting its existence. Objective information provided by schools seems to be constructed by José as the antidote against the secrecy, silence and shame that surround sex in the private space of the homes of the small community. Carrying this argument further, science is here considered the direct rival of religion because it defines sexuality as **normal** (35). Modernity through lengthy schooling undermines the conservative constructions of religious mores. The clash between these two discourses is here illustrated as the struggle between a modern, educated migrant man's view and that of traditional, uneducated, sedentary women. An idea of progress is implied in this excerpt, which would run from shame and silence to normality and openness, which would be facilitated by education and migration (34-38).

But there is another possible interpretation for this dialogue. José expresses that his main concern if he talks about sex with local girls is that he can be **misunderstood** (39-42), that is, that they will think that he is suggesting to have sex with them. Thus, in this

construction, José implies that for these girls to talk about sex is equivalent to do it, but that he is different to them and that he can make an impasse between word and action, which he explains by the effects of education -**I don't mean to say 'let's have sex'** (61-62), **I just want to talk about it** (64)-. In this sense, to talk about sex seems to be considered as one way of actually practicing it, and its prohibition may have to do with the possibility that conversation can produce some sort of pleasure that could anticipate or even incite to intercourse or to erotic encounters.

This warning against talking about the body and its sexual sensations and feelings is quite consistent in most conversations, but urban participants show it in a lesser degree, for they have less difficulty granting women the possession of sexual desires. Thus, in what participants consider traditional cultures, sexuality should be constrained to the order of the body and action, and excluded from symbolization through language, because the knowledge produced through talk is considered as inviting women to action.

In this chapter I have tried to show the contradictions, mixtures and tensions that the presence of different cultural discourses on sexuality produces in the experience of participants of this research. They have offered stories and metaphors that illustrated their struggle to come to terms with the contradictory prescriptions given by religious mores, on the one hand, and scientific and family planning discourses, on the other, which so often exclude and neglect large areas of their actual sexual experience, feelings and desires.

4. Metaphor and dualism: the control of female sexuality

The metaphor of female sexual activity and sensuality as **knowledge** that derived from the analysis of field material can be interpreted in terms of the social strategies of control of women's sexuality within these communities. This path of interpretation was hinted by the fact that this knowledge, at least in its practical and embodied version, should only be accessible to men.

The need for control of female sexuality in different societies and cultures throughout history has been widely studied by feminist scholars as one of the most important expressions of gender inequality. One trend in this analysis is given by explanations that stress the importance of female sexuality as the gateway to biological reproduction, thus requiring a whole set of rules, regulations and actions in order to manage it and protect certain systems of social organization. The strategies that societies design in order to exert this control are what Rubin (1975) called sex/gender systems²⁰. Following this argument, De Barbieri (1992) asserts that

Only women have a body that produces another body... Women and men are necessary for fertilization, but only women's body has ensured until now -despite excessive attempts of certain trend of science to avoid it- the survival of the fertilized egg and therefore of human species. All human group that intends to survive must ensure itself the existence of a certain number of adolescent women that can reproduce it (De Barbieri 1992:5*).

Thus, the female body in its reproductive phase is valuable and is given by society a particular power. The challenge throughout cultures and ages has been how to control women's reproductive capacity, and in order to accomplish this task it has been necessary to control

²⁰ As a preliminary definition, a 'sex/gender system' is the set of arrangements by which society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied (Rubin 1975:159).

their sexuality as well²¹. This is one of the reasons why sexual autonomy of women has been regarded as dangerous and threatening as well as the grounds for a generalized system in which women do not have rights over themselves, as opposed to being subject to the rights of others, mainly the men that exchange them.

One of the main strategies for the control of female sexuality is the cultural construction of meanings regarding the female body and its capacities of reproduction, through the regulation of their access to pleasure and sexual activity. Certain descriptions of female and male sexuality that have become dominant throughout history circulate and permeate many areas of everyday life and experience of women and men, defining the space for their feelings and desires, as well as the appropriate relationships for sexual activity to be carried out.

One of the descriptions that has been particularly pervasive in Western culture is the construction of a polarity between masculine and feminine; a dualism that requires its terms not only to be different, but opposed to each other. Haste (1993) argues that this polarity has been superposed onto other polarities, like public-private, active-passive and rationality-chaos, making certain spaces, personality traits and mental processes equivalent to supposed essential characteristics of the sexes. In this context:

Western culture has a strong tradition of rationality overcoming the forces of chaos that is closely interwoven with masculine versus feminine, and body over mind (Haste 1993:12).

Sexuality, as it can be clearly seen, is considered

²¹ However, as Rubin (1975) clearly states, what once was necessary in order to reproduce certain social orders has now, in modern societies, grown to be obsolete.

The organization of sex and gender once had functions other than itself - it organized society. Now, it only organizes and reproduces itself (Rubin 1975:199).

It remains unclear if such an outmode of the functions of sex/gender systems is applicable to changing societies like the Mexican communities studied here.

a threat against rationality, and since this model has been constructed through history mainly for and by men - the holders of reason in Western culture-, women have been linked to the temptation of the body and the sensual.

In Western Europe since the period of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century, men have assumed a strong connection between their rationality and their sense of masculine identity (Seidler 1987:82).

Although Mexican culture has inherited these ideas through the Spanish conquest, their transformation by the presence of indigenous cultures has yet to be studied yet. It is my impression that there are many masculinities in Mexico, determined by factors like class and ethnicity. For example, in light of the conversations of this research, the male identities constructed by participants from rural areas seem to rely more on power and authority over women than on reason. This might not be the case, however, with urban male participants, who have been more in contact with Western culture through formal education.

In the metaphors of dualism applied to gender, there is no possibility of relating to both of the terms because they are defined as opposed and exclusive of each other. Gender identity, especially masculine identity, has to be asserted against what is considered feminine. If the latter is equated to chaos, nature and intuition, all these otherwise assets of human knowledge are to be devalued and relegated.

Thus, apart from the structural considerations discussed above, the feminine as defined by Western culture produces anxieties against a fragile model of rationality that supports male domination. The ways in which societies deal with such anxieties are varied. One of them is the use of metaphors in order to convey certain mores and behaviour prescriptions, in this case, about female sexuality.

One of the most common metaphors of female sexuality both found in this research's accounts and generally in Western culture, is the construction of another highly contradictory dualism: one side is the image of the 'sexless' woman, who knows nothing about sexual feelings, desires and practices and who is initiated to them only through male desire and activity, and the other image is the excessively sexual woman; the mistress of seduction and deception. Needless to say, both images are often unsuitable and limiting in expressing the actual sexual experience of participants, but they seem to respond to male anxieties and needs in their quest for control of their relationship with women.

Also, according to the dominant construction of male sexuality as an imperative force that demands satisfaction, a definition of female lack of desire has matched quite well the need for a supposed external control of men against the feared impulse of their own sexuality.

The latter considerations serve as possible theoretical explanations of the constructions that I have described in this chapter, because their obvious gender inequality suggested that the social control of women's sexuality was a goal in the process.

However, this normativity is never completely vertical nor is it invariably obeyed, as shown by the dialogues interpreted here. Rather, subtle and open forms of resistance and transgression are shown by the participants in their attempts to produce a narrative that will give meaning to their experience, without isolating them from their social group. Their struggle to come to terms with their experience of their bodies and sexual activities as well as with the meanings attached to them by dominant discourses is plagued by negotiations, shifts and strategies.

In particular, the construction of an individual and autonomous subject for whom personal choice is possible

regarding sexuality does not seem to be a general and invariable process in the modernization of Mexican culture, as these stories can illustrate. Rather, the imposition of such an ideal is bringing about new dilemmas that cannot be solved individually until general conditions of life, both structural and cultural, allow for individual choice and entitlement to sexual desire to be really exercised.

**THE MORAL DIMENSION OF SEXUALITY:
EVIL, THE SACRED AND
RITUALS OF SEXUAL INITIATION**

This chapter discusses several aspects of the main constructions regarding the experience of first sexual intercourse that participants offered during the conversations, like the link of the value of virginity to gender and the close association between sexuality and evil, as regulated by complex and contradictory moral codes.

The meanings of sexual initiation differed considerably in terms of gender in the conversations. They all expressed a moral code that intended to regulate men's sexual access to women, while the same code proscribed any non-marital sexual expression for women. While premarital activity was often prescribed as a confirmation of adult male identity and social status, for women it was considered a great fault.

Gender was also applied to the association between sexuality and evil that emerged constantly during the conversations. Female virginity was often described as sacred and as the symbol of women's purity and worth, following the model of Catholic femininity portrayed by the Virgin Mary. In this context, a woman's intercourse without the blessing of the institution of marriage was defined as a stain that polluted the untouched female body.

Male penetration of a virgin out of wedlock was constructed as defilement and harm to her, and the men that did it were portrayed as perpetrators of damage. In participants' accounts, the transgression of such a sacred body called for a ritual that should repair it and restore the order that was broken by illegitimate intercourse, which was marriage or formal union, whether or not it was the wish of the couple to remain together.

A ritual about men's sexual initiation was also told, in which a passage from boyhood to manhood was enacted through first intercourse with a sex worker, during a male social event. While for boys sexual desire was a legitimate reason in itself to have intercourse, for girls it could only be justified because of surrender to love. In fact, those women that had sex only because of desire felt they had committed a fault and deserved some kind of punishment.

But just as these moral prescriptions were very present during the conversations, so were innumerable expressions of resistance, which seemed to be part of the code itself. Injunctions and transgressions were inseparable, always referring to each other in what seemed the contradictory operation of the moral system.

Participants adherence to these constructions varied according to their social origins and educational backgrounds, that is, to their exposure to the process of secularization and individualization of discourses of sexuality. They obeyed, disobeyed or questioned these prescriptions to different degrees according to their construction of themselves as independent subjects and of their entitlement to sexual enjoyment.

1. The prescription of female virginity: submission and resistance.

As said above, the meanings ascribed to women's first intercourse were radically different to those constructed for male initiation. The field material shows that all participants granted great importance to the preservation of female virginity in order to hold women's social status, whether they agreed with this or not, whether they obeyed it or not.

As derived from the conversations, one of the reasons for this prescription could be traced to structural

considerations regarding the exchange of women and the absence of a right to themselves and their bodies, because the preservation of virginity has been a way to control reproduction through women's sexuality¹. The importance of female virginity seems to rely on the idea that it is a good to be exchanged for marriage, and thus for women's future financial support. It was often stated by participants that the man has the duty, and also the privilege, to prove his bride's virginity as a sign of her moral quality and of his own manhood. The parents would be responsible for the girl's reputation, and they would inherit this responsibility to the husband. With the exception of urban participants, who grant women greater entitlement to sexual desire, the rest hold the prerogative of the man to accept or repudiate a supposedly non-virgin girl.

These different responses should be associated with the possibility of women being financially independent, because injunctions were questioned more frequently by urban girls, who have better work and educational opportunities. However, the relationship between structural conditions and cultural transformations is never automatic nor causal, so that the subjective importance of these constructions remains even though their origins could have disappeared.

This is why, although female virginity appeared during the conversations as having a strong symbolic content, the norm of keeping it was not obeyed by all female participants alike. For instance, only three of the eight women that had already had sex by the time of this research, did it when they had already formed a couple (Gabriela, Alicia and Claudia). Another one had sex with the man who later became her formal partner (Soledad) and the rest started their sexual activity with casual acquaintances or informal boyfriends (Mercedes, Bertina, Amanda and Marta).

¹ See chapter IV: 4. Metaphor or dualism: the control of female sexuality.

In the case of those women who started with their husbands, they did not speak of sexual desire as their motivation for initiation, but of love, conjugal obligation or desire of a child. They described intercourse as something to be feared and, at the same time, as the unavoidable fate of couplehood. Pleasure is particularly absent from these women's discourse, and intercourse was not constructed as a benefit that marriage could bring about. Also, the event itself is hardly ever described during the conversations, specially in terms of sensations, but it appears mainly as a necessary discomfort in order to achieve motherhood, which is an essential element to their female identity. The women who spoke like this about sex constructed themselves as very much identified and involved with dominant discourses of their social group. These prescriptions seemed to be incarnated, as if the absence of desire was inscribed in their experience of their bodies and in their identities. This is the case of Claudia, who tells about the discomfort of her wedding night and about the struggle she went to in order to preserve her virginity:

- 1 RESEARCHER: When you got married, were you scared?...
2 what were your expectations of marriage?
3 CLAUDIA: A lot, of the first time we were together.
4 R: What did you expect? Were you curious?
5 C: Well, yes, I was because, as I told you, my friends
6 would tell me, they were married already, and they
7 would tell me this or that, and so I was curious,
8 because... thank God that I found the strength because
9 one has to be alone... and that was it.
10 R: Did you want to be with your husband? Did you like
11 your husband or would you rather be alone?
12 C: No, I wanted to be alone.
13 R: And how was it the first time?
14 C: Well, a little difficult, you see? Because one...
15 doesn't know, well, it is very difficult for one, so I
16 said 'OK'... I had taken care of myself because
17 sometimes it happens, since one goes to work there will
18 always be somebody... a man that can... there are so
19 many rapes nowadays, right? Thank God it never happened
20 to me and I gave myself to him as it must be, without
21 any problem.
22 R: Why do you say that it was difficult, the first
23 time... what was it that was difficult... or what

24 happened?
25 C: Well, as I told you, one doesn't know and it is a
26 little embarrassing, it hurts, doesn't it? One can't
27 help it.
28 R: Did it hurt?
29 C: Yes.
30 R: And besides the pain, were you scared or anything
31 else?
32 C: No, I wasn't because, as I told you, I had talked to
33 my friends.
34 R: What had they told you?
35 C: Well, that it hurts, that one bleeds that, well...
36 that it's nice, well... that it's nice.
37 R: So, it hurt... and... did you bleed or not?
38 C: Yes, a lot.
39 R: You did? Were you scared?
40 C: No, it was natural because I wanted a child.
41 R: You knew about this? So you weren't scared?
42 C: Well, although my mother never told me about that.
43 R: And, what did your husband say about it? About your
44 bleeding or that it hurt... didn't he say that it was
45 nice that you were still a virgin?
46 C: Well, I was. And he was satisfied, I think, because
47 he found that I was OK.
48 R: Were you [satisfied as well]?
49 C: Well, yes, yes. It was good, wasn't it? Because they
50 say one can lose the virginity... well, not exactly,
51 but that if one falls down, well, one loses the way,
52 isn't it? That's what they say around here.
(Claudia: 4)

My first question suggests fear as an emotional predisposition to Claudia's experience of first intercourse, but right away I go back to a wider question about her expectations of marriage (1-2). Her affirmative answer does not explain what kind of expectations she had or whether she was excited or afraid, except that she expected something extraordinary of her first intercourse **-A lot, of the first time we were together (3)-**. I then invite her to specify what kind of expectations she had and offer the alternative meaning of curiosity (4). This noun implies that I thought Claudia had a certain wish to know what intercourse was about, albeit not necessarily sexual desire. She accepts this definition and goes on to tell me about its sources, which are her conversations with **friends** who were already

married and who possibly told her about their sexual experiences. The way in which Claudia quotes her friends shows evidence of two prescriptions: one is that their sexual practice was confined to marriage and, furthermore, that Claudia could think that it happens -or should happen- only within that institution **-my friends would tell me, they were married already** (5-6)-. The second is that she does not mention nor explicitly describe sexual encounters, and uses demonstrative pronouns in order to imply them **-and they would tell me this or that** (6-7)-.

The next part of her utterance seems to be a confession of sexual inexperience that suggests that Claudia felt the need to convey it to me. Following such argument, an overpowering impulse seems to have been awakened by her conversations with friends; so powerful in fact that Claudia invokes **God** as the source of the **strength** she needed in order to control it (8). The reason for this control is an abstract rule uttered impersonally: **one has to be alone** (9), probably referring to single women like she was then.

I then ask about her position before such rule, inquiring about her own desire **-Did you want to be with your husband? Did you like your husband or would you rather be alone?** (10-11)-. Her answer directly contradicts her last utterance, because she denies any sexual desire (12). Probably baffled by this confusion, I then ask about her first sexual experience with her husband (13).

Her first definition is that it was **difficult** and the reason for this was her lack of experience. The way in which this sentence is phrased suggests that she includes herself within a category of virgin, inexperienced women **-Because one... doesn't know, well, it is very difficult for one** (14-15)-. She then moves away from the actual event and goes on trying to show her virtue by explaining that she had **taken care** of herself (16). By the context in which this is uttered, it could mean that Claudia considers that

intercourse was harmful to women like her, and that she had to avoid it by all means.

It is in the next utterance that Claudia completes her understanding of taking care of herself by making reference to **rapes** as frequent events (19). She places this danger in the public world, specifically in the world of labour, thus constructing the family home as the only safe place for virgins, and men as a constant threat to women's virginity - **since one goes to work there will always be somebody... a man that can... there are so many rapes nowadays, right?** (17-19).

Again, Claudia resorts to **God** as the only possible protection against this threat -**Thank God it never happened to me** (19-20)-. But it is not the harm this event could bring on her what she seems to be concerned about, but that it would mean she had broken the rule of virginity and this would bring negative social consequences -**I gave myself to him as it must be, without any problem** (20-21)-. Although rape would have been against her will and through the use of violence, her utterance does not construct her as a victim, but as a transgressor. Thus, this whole sequence suggests that not only premarital sexual practice is forbidden by and for Claudia, but that it would not matter whether she complied to it or not; it is enough not to be a virgin to deserve social stigma.

Although until now she had not constructed herself as an active individual who makes choices, she does so when it comes to intercourse within marriage, where she describes her practice as her own decision, albeit in order to obey a prescription that she shares and holds -**I gave myself to him as it must be** (20)-.

I then go back to the actual experience and ask for further explanation of what she considered **difficult**, which she constructs in terms of embarrassment and physical pain. These sensations are considered unavoidable and were for her

not reasons enough to refuse intercourse **-one doesn't know and it is a little embarrassing, it hurts doesn't it? One can help it** (25-27)-. I then link these descriptions to fear, but she denies it, because of the information she had from her friends (32-33). Answering my request, she quotes her friends voices indirectly describing their experiences of pain and bleeding. These voices' descriptions of the experience as **nice** are contradictory with the pain and the bleeding **-Well, that it hurts, that one bleeds that, well... that it's nice, well... that it's nice** (35-36)-.

I do not point out this contradiction immediately and I carry on asking Claudia about her bleeding (37). But, after she answers affirmatively, I insist on fear, possibly as an emotion that I considered coherent with her previous description (39). Claudia's negative reply offers an explanation that goes beyond the experience itself and brings about her wish to be a mother **-No, it was natural because I wanted a child** (40)-. Sex appears here mainly as a necessary nuisance in order to fulfill the superior role of motherhood.

My answer seems to miss her explanation and put the cause of her absence of fear on her previous knowledge, rather than on her desire of a child, and my insistence on fear (41) is implicitly accepted through a shy accusation against her mother for not having instructed her about intercourse **-Well, although my mother never told me about that** (42)-.

My next question points to the couple's interaction and the possible meanings attached to her bleeding and pain, which I suggest are based on a gender stereotype: that Claudia's husband would find it **nice** that she was still a virgin (43-45). Her answer first confirms her virginity and then describes what she supposes that her husband felt, therefore suggesting that there was not a conversation between them about the subject **-And he was satisfied, I**

think (46)-. Her final remark seems an evaluation of her status by the husband, as if she had past some sort of quality test for marriage **-he found that I was OK** (47)-.

In an effort to know the participant's position before this sort of evaluation, I ask her if she was satisfied as well with this situation (48) and she answers positively expressing the fear of having lost her virginity without her knowing it and not as a result of intercourse **-Well, yes, yes. It was good, wasn't it? Because they say one can loose the virginity... well, not exactly, but that if one falls down** (49-51)-. This preoccupation would suggest that there are, for Claudia, 'innocent' and 'guilty' causes of the loss of virginity, but that young women could be rejected either way. In fact, the participant attributes subjective effects to the loss of virginity under any circumstance. She defines these effects as to be lost, which implies a curious connection between the physiological event and a supposed change in girls' sexual attitudes, which could become more open **-one looses the way, isn't it?** (51-52)-. This belief is spoken, in Claudia's account, by the voice of the town's people **-That's what they say around here** (52)-.

In this brief exchange Claudia never questions the inequality that underlies the different treatment accorded to female and male virginity but, rather, she only expresses her husband's and her satisfaction to have complied with it.

This excerpt illustrates the meanings attached to sexual activity by those rural women who did not talk about their own sexual desire, nor about pleasant sensations or arousal. This silence matches the attributes of purity and discretion that are very much harmonious with the Catholic image of a mother. Moreover, intercourse appears here as a necessary discomfort in order to achieve motherhood, which is the ultimate goal for this kind of female gender identity.

A common theme in these women's stories is the lack of

knowledge and information about intercourse, which caused them to fear the experience. Even among those that knew about coitus, penetration was imagined as a painful and almost violent act. These images of pain contrast radically with the impatience that male participants expressed because initiation had been constructed for and by them as pleasurable, although the way in which it was carried out often was not. What men seemed to fear was not the encounter itself, but the effects that it could have on their gender identity, as if they were submitting to a test.

In contrast with the women that had their first experience when married, those that had it with a casual partner or an informal boyfriend (Mercedes, Bertina, Amanda and Marta), showed a greater entitlement to their sexual desires and did not express fear, although some of them did not have any previous information about intercourse. In their accounts, they constructed themselves as active characters in the search for sexual activity because, although the initiative came always from the men, these women allowed them to get close enough as to have sex. This construction of them as passive and responsive may have the intention to see themselves as 'pure', a difficult task because it actually contradicts their actual behaviour of accepting intercourse. Frequently, this contradiction was solved through a share of guilt and self-accusation after the sexual encounter. Bertina, a 30-year-old single woman from Guanajuato, tells about the disgust she felt for her body after intercourse:

- 1 RESEARCHER: Would you say that it was sudden?
2 BERTINA: Yes, it was sudden.
3 R: You hadn't thought about it a day or two before?
4 B: No.
5 R: You didn't?
6 B: Neither he did, it was just like that, sudden.
7 R: Sudden? Were you scared? Were you happy or were you
8 scared?
9 B: Well, when I felt sick I did, I was scared.
10 R: Later, you mean?
11 B: Yes, later. Not then, but later I was, because I...

12 I was very sick.
13 R: Were you sick later?
14 B: I was throwing up and I had diarrhea.
15 R: So then you felt sick and you told your mom about
16 it?
17 B: Yes, I had to tell her.
18 R: Why were you so sick?
19 B: I don't know... I don't know... I was sick and I
20 said to myself 'maybe I have something... I have
21 something because I did that thing' or something like
22 that.
23 R: So you mean you were scared when you felt sick?
24 B: That's right, I was scared... And I told my mom and
25 she said 'well, he must have done something bad to you,
26 something'... because I was really, really, really
27 sick, I had to tell her. The truth is that I didn't
28 want to tell her because I was shy, you are always shy
29 with your parents... that they will... that they will
30 say something, that they will scold you, that they will
31 throw you out or something... but I, when that happened
32 to me I... I only... my sister said 'something is wrong
33 with you', and then I was even sicker, sicker, sicker,
34 and I had to tell her, I was crying.
35 R: Because you were throwing up and had diarrhea and
36 they didn't know what you had?
37 B: I had to tell my mom.
(Bertina: 2)

This dialogue tells a story about the negative effects that Bertina attributes to sexual intercourse upon her body. My first question defines her experience as **sudden** (1), as if it happened without any anticipation or planning, and as responding only to the unexpected emergence of desire. Bertina accepts this definition and therefore denies feeling any previous desire (2-6). I then invite the participant to describe her emotional state during the event, and I offer two opposed meanings: fear and happiness -**Sudden? Were you scared? Were you happy or were you scared?** (7-8). Bertina chooses **fear** although she does not apply it to intercourse. Rather, her fear came afterwards when she felt sick (9). Her explanation for this sickness comes later, as requested by me, and it is constructed as an inner dialogue in which she considers sex as the direct cause of her symptoms -**I was sick and I said to myself 'maybe I have something... I have**

something because I did that thing' or something like that (19-22)-.

Then Bertina tells a story in which she quotes her mother's and her sister's voice, as well as her own inner speech. In the first part of the account, Bertina's mother's voice supports her previous supposition about sex as harmful, but this time the boy is seen as the agent of harm and it is his action that is considered **bad -And I told my mom and she said 'well, he must have done something bad to you, something'** (24-26)-. Next, the participant seems to regard fear of harm as the motivation to tell her mother about the experience **-because I was really, really, really sick, I had to tell her (26-27)-**. If followed, this line of thought could consider sickness as a sort of punishment for sex, which could have forced Bertina's confession to an authority figure.

The reasons for not talking about her experience before are expressed in terms of shyness, which means that, for Bertina, sexual activity is something to be hidden and not talked about with her parents because she could be punished (27-31). This idea reinforces her previous definitions of sex as a fault. Only the fear of physical damage motivated Bertina to disclose her action, maybe as a way of asking for help (31-34).

In this story sex is seen as a physical danger and, although Bertina seems to accept her sexual urge, she does not articulate it openly. In fact, she could have explained her physical discomfort in many other ways, but she does so as a direct consequence of her sexual activity. This implies that she constructed sexuality as harmful for her, because her bodily reaction and her explanation of it resemble some sort of intoxication.

The latter is an illustration of the accounts offered by female participants of rural origin who, although expressed their entitlement to desire, consider that their

sexual behaviour opposes their context's moral prescriptions, so that they see themselves at fault and betraying their family's -specially their mother's- expectations of matching the dominant model of good woman. The existence of such a norm is not questioned, it is only that they situate themselves as its transgressors.

Even in Mexico City, young women felt their future support at risk if they had first sexual intercourse within unstable relationships, even though their liberal discourse suggested the contrary. At the most, these girls protested against the restraining effects of this prescription. Urban participants' position (Patricia, Mercedes and Soledad) differed from rural women's, because they openly questioned the prescription of female virginity before marriage. In a discourse that held the egalitarian ideal of feminism, these participants claimed their right to have premarital sex just like men do. Mercedes, a 22 year-old woman from Mexico City who got married when pregnant with her first child, offered the following explanation of the different treatment given to men's and women's virginity:

- 1 RESEARCHER: Why do you think it is so important to be a
2 virgin before getting married? what is so important
3 about it? what does it mean? why is it so valuable?
4 MERCEDES: Well... it could be because of the value that
5 the man gives to the woman, right?
6 R: Uhm.
7 M: Because... if you are a virgin, well... they think
8 that you are a little bit more valuable or... [at
9 least] they won't be saying to you 'who knows how many
10 men you've gone through' and...
11 R: ... so, if you are not a virgin anymore, or a girl
12 is not a virgin by the time she gets married... well,
13 does that mean that she's had a lot of men?
14 M: That's right.
15 R: And... why do they judge the fact that a girl has
16 had other relationships?
17 M: Well... I think that they shouldn't judge that
18 because... men shouldn't judge us because they...
19 well... they also have their experiences and even with
20 more freedom than we do, isn't it?

21 R: Uhm.
22 M: So, then... many times... the man hasn't understood
23 it, and I don't think he ever will.
(Mercedes: 1)

In this dialogue Mercedes offers an explanation for the prohibition of sex out of wedlock for young women, while at the same time raises a claim for gender equality. I start by asking about the different value given to male and female virginity (1-3), and she answers with a hypothesis that relates it to gender and, more specifically, to men's control over women's sexuality **-it could be because of the value that the man gives to the woman, right?** (4-5)-. In this utterance, the judgment is rendered relative by attributing it only to a specific group -men- and thus not considering it a universal norm. Mercedes continues by quoting men's voices in the sense that women's virginity makes them **more valuable** (8). This adjective suggests that female virginity could be considered as a good to be exchanged for something else that men have the power to give, which could be marriage or social legitimacy. By contrast, sex is thus constructed as something that strips the woman of such a positive value and harms her social status.

The relational consequences of this inequality are then described by Mercedes, when she quotes men's voices accusing women of promiscuity **-they won't be saying to you 'who knows how many men you've gone through'** (9-10)-. Several interpretations can be derived from this expression. First, these voices are cited as if men were a homogeneous and compact group. Second, Mercedes' expression is an anticipation and a defense against an accusation that she considers likely to occur. Female virginity is thus constructed both as an element of women's value and as a protection against future mistreatment by husbands. Finally, based on the evidence of her loss of virginity, men's voices conclude that the woman has been promiscuous, as if once sex

has been done, it cannot be stopped (11-14). In any case, this idea considers that women are not entitled to their own bodies, nor do they have sexual rights over themselves, because others -men- can judge their value according to this situation.

Since the reasons for this conclusion are not yet displayed by Mercedes, I then ask for further elaboration on them, proposing a definition of men's actions as judgmental, and constructing them as having the power to evaluate women's status (15-16). Mercedes' answer is not an explanation of this, but a protest against men putting themselves in such a superior position **-I think that they shouldn't judge that** (17)-. In order to support her argument, Mercedes includes herself in the category of women that have been judged by men **-men shouldn't judge us** (18)- and goes on to explain her reasons for rejecting this idea, based upon a discourse of gender equality and justice, in the sense that men should not judge in others what they themselves do **-because they... well... they also have their experiences and even with more freedom than we do, isn't it?** (19-20)-. She finally attributes this injustice to men's lack of understanding, as if equality was an obvious concept that men have been unable to grasp **-the man hasn't understood it, and I don't think he ever will** (22-23)-.

In this dialogue, Mercedes questions the idea of female virginity as a good to be exchanged for marriage because she constructs herself as equal to men, and because she claims a certain sense of justice regarding sexuality and its free exercise.

As it can be derived from these examples, the continuous transgression of the prescription of virginity might have been actually punished in previous generations, but it is now justified by the transgressors through modern discourses of individual choice and entitlement to sexual practice. However, these discourses do not eliminate the

moral injunction, but only coexist with it. The result is the existence of a discursive rule that nobody seems to respect it anymore. Thus, modern constructions of sexuality mix with Catholic morals and produce contradictions and confusions whose resolutions are not always conflict-free. These subjects of sexuality are being confronted with several moral systems to which they must accommodate in such a way as not to be completely outcast from the norms of their social groups, nor excluded from the experience and standards of modern subjectivity.

But, apart from these transformations, a question remains: where does this proscription come from? What are the reasons participants have for keeping women's virginity? Constructions of sex as evil and dangerous, and virginity as sacred, were often present in many of the conversations. To them I will turn next.

2. The moral dimension of sexuality

In the conversations carried out for this research, the concepts of evil and bad were often ascribed to sexual practices. This suggested that sexual activity had a moral character and that there was a need to regulate it through a certain sexual subjectivity, moral norms and codes of behaviour. The idea that sexual practice is a moral matter suggested Foucault's work (1981, 1988b) as a useful framework to analyze such meanings, because it takes into account the political and historical dimension of the social construction of sexuality and subjectivity.

Even though his work is primarily historic, because it traces the processes through which Western culture has given individuals elements to constitute themselves as subjects of a certain sexuality, his thoughts on the concepts of morals are relevant for this approach:

By 'morals' we understand a group of values and norms of action that are proposed to individuals and groups

through diverse prescriptive apparatuses, like family, educational institutions, churches, etc (Foucault 1988b:26*).

In this view, moralities include both codes and prescriptive values proposed by diverse institutions, and certain 'forms of subjectivization and practices of the self' (Foucault 1988b:31*) offered to individuals in order to follow such codes. The individual does not only follow moral prescriptions, but also constructs a relationship with him/herself in order to become a moral subject:

It is true that all moral action implies a relationship with reality where it takes place, and a relationship to the code it is referred to, but it also implies a definite relationship with oneself; this is not simply 'self-conscience', but the constitution of oneself as a 'moral subject', in which the individual constitutes the object of this moral practice, defines his position before the precept that he follows, defines a certain way of being that will serve as moral fulfillment of himself, and in order to do so he acts upon himself, he seeks to know himself, he controls himself, he proves himself, he perfects himself, he transforms himself (Foucault 1988b:29*).

One of the possible ways of being a moral subject comes from what Foucault calls the 'determination of the substance of ethics' (Foucault 1988b:27*), which is the way in which the individual must shape certain aspects of him/herself as a matter for moral behaviour. For participants of this research sexual actions and sometimes thoughts and desires, were such 'substance of ethics', so that they described several examples in which they policed themselves and others regarding sexuality.

According to Foucault (1988b), moral codes are not always explicitly spoken and taught by institutions in a coherent set of principles, but there are also diffuse and implicit codes that are not systematically organized and therefore allow for certain 'compromises or escapes' (Foucault 1988b:26*). In this research, these vague but powerful codes were often described by participants. The prescriptions regarding proper sexual behaviour for girls

and boys were not quoted as if they were spoken in a systematic way by concrete institutions like the church or law but, rather, as uttered by the voice of impersonal but omnipresent subjects like **the people** of the community.

Participants' reactions before these discourses allowed me to analyze their actual position before such codes, and their strategies of submission and/or resistance, as explained by Foucault (1988b):

...[submission is] the way in which the individual establishes his or her relationship to the norm and acknowledges him or herself as linked to the obligation of putting it at work (Foucault 1988b:28*).

2.1. Sexual intercourse as evil.

As said above, during the dialogues participants spoke both about codes and prescriptions stated by different authority figures (father, mother, **people**, priest, etc), and about their own behaviour toward them. In the case of the notion of the sexual as evil, there were clear differences between rural and urban participants. Participants from Guanajuato and Oaxaca seemed to embody certain moral beliefs by speaking of them as universal truths that would rule all human relations, even though they might not obey them. In this case, their sense of fault was the logical consequence of transgression. However, transgression-resistance seems precisely the condition for the norm to exist, because without it power could not be exercised and punishment could not be enforced. Rural participants thus constructed their position before sexual morals as a fusion between themselves and their surrounding culture, in which sexual desire was regarded as bad.

An example of this group is offered in the next excerpt, which comes from the conversation with Amanda, from rural Guanajuato. It is a story that shows the way in which a moral code functions for her, as well as her behaviour

regarding it:

1 AMANDA: ...my mom came in, she had gone to San Miguel
2 and she was very angry, 'hey, they told me things about
3 you'.
4 RESEARCHER: What did they tell her?
5 A: [She said] that they had told her that... that they
6 had seen me naked with a man, that I was underneath a
7 bridge, a bridge that is close to here, on the road,
8 and then, I said, well, I was angry, right?, 'but,
9 why?, if I have never done that, why? why do people say
10 that about me?', and I listened, and she said, 'it's
11 true'. 'Look', I said, 'if you want to believe the
12 people, do so, if you don't trust me, that's your
13 problem, but look...' I mean, she wanted to hit me.
14 'Look, mom, I... I've never done that, what they have
15 told you, if you want to believe it, you can. In fact,
16 tell me who was the person who told you', I was crying,
17 right?, 'I wouldn't be like I am, if not, tell me who
18 told you', I said, 'I swear I feel I could kill that
19 person this minute!', I told my mom, because I was
20 angry, I said 'why do they say lies about me if I've
21 never done anything like that, why?...' My mom says,
22 'no, well, I was told by the lady...' 'what lady?',
23 'I'm not going to tell you' because she saw I was angry
24 and I was squeezing a knife in my hand. I say, 'what
25 lady?', 'I'm not telling you which lady', she says,
26 'but this I tell you, if you are doing what they
27 said... you'll see', but 'what can you do to me?',
28 'well', she says, 'I'll come up with something'...
29 Well, ever since then she was traumatized by gossip and
30 the minute I went out, for instance, with my
31 girlfriends, my girlfriends could not come and see
32 me...
33 R: From the village?
34 A: Yes, because my mom would say, 'here come your
35 friends', she always said that to me, 'here come your
36 friends to pick you up', she says, 'I'm sure you'll
37 take off with them', I mean, she would start to nag me,
38 I'd say 'no, mom, look, if I go, it's not because I'll
39 do anything bad, I mean, I'm leaving because I feel
40 like them, like going out', I say 'because maybe when
41 you were little you were not allowed to go out for some
42 reason', I said, 'but, why do you...?', 'well, because
43 of what they say about you'. I said 'but I'm telling
44 you I'm not going to do anything bad, I'm not going to
45 do anything bad, mom'. And she started to trust me, she
46 started to trust me, but anyway, she would always...
47 always follow me.
48 R: Did she?
49 A: Wherever I went, she would follow me, just watching
50 me.

(Amanda: 4)

Amanda starts this dialogue by constructing a polyphony in which she quotes her own voice, as well as her mother's and an impersonal speaker's. In the first part of the story, this speaker tells the mother about a supposed action by her daughter: that she had been **naked with a man** (5-6) in a public place where she had been seen. This action is the cause of her mother's anger, who commits herself to define it as bad and reprehensible. It is an accusation that deserves scolding from parental authority. This accusation considers that nudity is wrong, and that it should be denounced and reprimanded, thus expressing the idea of an evil and damnable character of sexual activity².

Amanda then describes an emotional response to this accusation **-I was angry, right?** (8)- which would imply that she rejects the charges against her and asks me to confirm if this reaction is adequate. The next lines (8-10) show a sense of injustice and incomprehension in which Amanda demands the accusers for the grounds of their statement and tries to advance her innocence by denying the action **-I have never done that** (9)-. This utterance does not question the morally evil character of the action, but only the truthfulness of the accusation.

Amanda's argument in order to defend her innocence is about who the mother should trust: the impersonal speaker's or her own voice **-if you want to believe the people, do so, if you don't trust me, that's your problem** (11-13)-. The end of this small dialogue shows that apparently the mother chose to believe **the people** and to continue her scolding.

Amanda goes on quoting herself during her defense, denying the actions that she is accused of and fighting back

² Bataille's work on eroticism considers nudity as the prelude to sexual activity, and therefore of importance for any moral code:

The decisive action is to be naked. Nudity is opposed to the closed state, that is, the state of discontinuous existence. It is a state of communication, which reveals the search for a possible continuity of being beyond self-withdrawal. Bodies open themselves to continuity through those secret tubes which give us the feeling of obscenity (Bataille 1992:31*).

by demanding her mother to reveal the source of information in order to retaliate violently (16-19). In this fragment, it is not about arguing against the accusation itself, but about a counterattack because of the damage done by it.

This description reflects the severity of the supposed transgression, which Amanda generalizes to all situations of nudity and eroticism, thus widening the universe of the punishable. With this, Amanda expresses that she understands that what is considered **bad**³ is sexual practice in general, and not only the action described by the accuser.

The damage done by the accusation is so great that death against that who posed it would be the deserved punishment **-I swear I feel I could kill that person this minute!** (18-19). After describing a series of actions that backed her anger, Amanda quotes her mother threatening her with a vague punishment if the accusation was in fact true - **'but this I tell you: if you are doing what they say, you'll see'** (25-27)-. With this, the mother grants her daughter the benefit of doubt and delays punishment to the time in which the wrong could be fully confirmed. Amanda's answer is a challenge to the mother's punishing power **-but 'what can you do to me?'** (27)-, who in turn only repeats a vague but threatening sentence **-'I'll come up with something'** (28)-.

The last part of this dialogue (28-31) is a description of the behavioural consequences of events, in which Amanda says that the mother increased surveillance of her movements after the accusation. Amanda chose a word from the psychological jargon to describe her mother's mental state: **she was traumatized by gossip** (29), which speaks of the way in which she uses modern science discourse in order to name a subjective experience.

Amanda then quotes her mother's voice, resenting her outings with friends (33-36). The participant interprets

³ In Spanish bad and evil are expressed with the same word: **maldad**.

these quotations as scolding for her hypothetical behaviour, based on the accusation. In this occasion, Amanda chooses to calm her mother down with the promise that she will not commit any fault **-if I go, it's not because I'll do anything bad** (38-39)-. This expression is linked to descriptions of sexuality as bad or evil. This is apparently the reason for Amanda's violent reaction against the accusation, because it puts her in a position in which she is supposedly breaking moral norms that she shares, and it questions her quality as a person.

After a brief counter attack by Amanda (39-42) and a repetition of her mother's argument, the participant responds by promising to keep the prohibition and adds a reiterative moral evaluation of sexual activity as evil - **'but I'm telling you I'm not going to do anything bad, I'm not going to do anything bad, mom'** (43-45)-. This repetition may express the importance of rendering explicit the fact that she shares the same moral values as her mother, and that she would not transgress them with a sexual episode.

Several relevant aspects to the construction of sexual activity are depicted in this account. First, there is a story about the way in which an implicit sexual norm is enforced within the community; a norm that seems to be about the prohibition for single women to have sexual relations. The prohibition has a protective function of some sort of element that needs to be respected. This element seems to be female virginity.

The second element illustrated by this excerpt is Amanda's position before the sexual norm: she subscribes to and obeys it, and does not question the idea that sexuality is evil. She submits to the implicit moral code expressed through her mother's authority, and thus sexual behaviour becomes an issue through which she can police herself as well as be policed by others. Still, she did have intercourse out of wedlock.

This example shows how some participants regarded sexuality as bad and, although many of them agreed on this description, there was a gendered difference in their position before this conception. Even though both men and women used such a metaphor, in the case of men the injunction was not applied to all their possible sexual activity -as it was for women- but only to their actions with a female virgin, as the following excerpt illustrates. It comes from the conversation with Armando, from rural Guanajuato:

- 1 RESEARCHER: Armando, was it hard for you to wait until
2 you met your wife?
3 ARMANDO: No, no. Because, as I told you, really, there
4 were times when... I thought that... that if I had sex
5 I could maybe get her... pregnant.
6 R: The girl?
7 A: The girl I had.
8 R: Aha.
9 A: And then, I say, well... what if I don't... don't
10 love her?, then it wouldn't be any good, because...
11 many times they say, 'well... what now? now you have to
12 marry her, you have done something bad to her' or
13 something like that, right?
14 R: Aha.
15 A: Then, that's why I thought, I said to myself,
16 'well... I want to have sex, yes, but... but it's...
17 it's hard, because they would want that from me and...
18 and then if you don't like her much...'
19 R: What?
20 A: Or you don't love her, right?
21 R: Uhm.
22 A: That's why I waited.
(Armando: 1)

This dialogue starts with a question in which I construct Armando's sexual need almost as an alien force to himself, that needed his conscious effort in order to control it, and marriage as the only context in which it should be expressed **-was it hard for you to wait until you met your wife?** (1-2)-, but he denies that he felt such an urge because his reasons against having sex were overpowering: he feared pregnancy. Armando then quotes a subject that speaks a norm -in the third person of the

plural-, who also states a moral sentence and command **-many times they say, 'well... what now? now you have to marry her, you have done a bad thing to her'** (10-12)- . Armando is warned to repair, through marriage, the damage he has done to the woman by getting her pregnant. But the question is: what is really considered **bad**, pregnancy or intercourse? The former makes the latter evident, and the wrong could be intercourse, which in this utterance is expressed as if inflicted on the girl by him. Thus expressed, this idea deprives the woman of the possibility of having wanted intercourse herself and of having been an active subject looking for it; woman is constructed as victim. She has no erotic desire; he does, and his sexual desire is a kind of abuse against her.

The last phrase of this quotation **-you have done a bad thing to her** (12)- expresses an association between non-marital sexual relations and evil. This is an expression of a prohibition of premarital intercourse and of a corresponding punitive system. In fact, it seems that the only way to prevent the deed is to limit the practice of sexuality to the institution of marriage. The prohibition refers to the preservation of female virginity, and the man would be the emissary of evil through his seduction and penetration of the woman's body which would thus be a virgin and unpolluted space. Armando finishes his intervention asking for confirmation from me (13) and trying to get me to endorse his decision of abstinence. There are no elements so far as to say that Armando resists this norm. Rather, he seems to respect it, because he decides to restrain himself from committing the transgression in order to avoid punishment. He does not question its existence, origins or formulation, he only obeys it. However, he does not make it completely his own because he expresses it as if it were the voice of an abstract and collective speaker, and not as his own judgment about himself or others.

Both Amanda's and Armando's accounts construct a code that seems to be taken-for-granted by the speakers in their speech; a code that regulates gender relations around sexual practice and attributes different positions to women and men, because it seems that female sexual activity is considered as more dangerous than male's.

Both participants define their sexual actions as a moral matter. Their condemnation of any sexual activity before marriage (although Amanda did not respect it) could be an expression of their submission to the moral code. However, there is a gendered difference between these two accounts in terms of desire. While Amanda does not mention it, Armando states the existence of his impulses and makes them the subject of his conscious control by deciding not to satisfy them and by giving them another solution: waiting. Thus, while only the action itself is the subject of Armando's control, both desire and activity seem to be the moral matter for Amanda, who does not even mention arousal.

Also, both participants recognize that there is a need to prevent any sexual intercourse from occurring while they are single, so that they accept the norm as a precept for themselves. In the case of Armando, giving up the possibility of acting on his desire is his form of submission, while defending her virginity from accusations is Amanda's.

By contrast, urban participants seemed to establish in their accounts a distant or even resistant relationship to the meaning of sexuality as evil, and therefore did not consider themselves as forced to follow it. Rather, they intended to question the belief itself. This is a major resistance strategy, aimed at dismantling the will of truth involved in such norms and therefore depriving them of their universal stature. These participants struggled with the sense of evil given to sexual practice and tried to give it a less constraining meaning, as well as to separate

themselves relatively from these mandates. However, although in the conversations they tried to resist Catholic morality, they did so in accordance to the ideals of modern discourses, which could become themselves another form of the exercise of power, through different and more subtle forms of control. Such is the case of Mercedes, from Mexico City, who protests against gender inequality in terms of sex before marriage:

1 RESEARCHER: How was it for you, when you told your
2 husband that you were not a virgin anymore?
3 MERCEDES: Well, I told him from the beginning, when he
4 proposed to me... I told him and... well, he was a
5 little disappointed, but he said to me 'well, it's good
6 that you told me and I thank you because... well...
7 but... well, I accept you anyway'.
8 R: How did you feel with that answer?
9 M: Well... a little upset because... well, why can
10 they... they can have all the experience in the world
11 and one can't [do that]...
12 R: Right, so you didn't like that he told you... 'well,
13 I accept you', is that right?
14 M: Yes.
15 R: Didn't you tell him that?
16 M: No, I didn't...
17 R: ... think of it.
18 M: No, I didn't think of it.
19 R: And now, in time, what do you think about this?
20 M: Well... I have told him, 'why are men like that?,
21 why can you have all the experience that you want if...
22 if the value of a woman is not the hymen... tell me,
23 but her feelings or anything else.
24 R: And, what was his answer?
25 M: Well... that women, we have to be more... how could
26 I say?.... I mean, more discreet.
(Mercedes: 2)

This excerpt tells about a dialogue between Mercedes and her husband, as she answers my question about his reaction to her loss of virginity (1-2). Firstly, she makes it clear to me that she had told him **from the beginning** (3), as if it was necessary to warn him about this situation, especially because this dialogue happened in the context of his proposal of marriage (3-4). Mercedes then describes her husband's state of mind about the news, which was of

disappointment (4-5), so suggesting that he in fact expected her to be a virgin. Next, the participant quotes her husband's voice directly in what seems to be a rapid recovery from his disappointment, because he even thanked her for her sincerity -**well, it's good that you told me and I thank you (5-6)**-. This double-voiced speech shows that Mercedes considered that her husband should know about her non-virginity before marriage, which suggests that it could have been a condition for him to get married. However, as quoted by Mercedes, his discourse then changes to that of superiority, in which he entitles himself to **accept** or reject his girlfriend on the basis of such a fault -**I accept you anyway (7)**-.

My next question intends to find out about Mercedes' opinion about this answer (8), which is quite negative, because she goes on arguing against gender inequality that allows men to have greater sexual freedom -**well, why can they... they can have all the experience in the world and one can't [do that] (9-11)**-. My next utterance is only a confirmation of what I sensed as her rebellious attitude toward such a power differential (12-13).

Thus, by contrast with Amanda⁴, Mercedes sees herself as more entitled to her sexual desire and practice, because she does not thank her husband for his condescending answer but, rather, questions his privilege to decide upon her value as a future wife, based upon the narrow criteria of her virginity.

The rest of this dialogue elaborates further on Mercedes' resistance to the prescription of female virginity by asking her opinion about it in the present time (19). She answers this question by arguing, again, against the different social treatment that is given to single men's and women's sexuality, claiming for herself the right to have as

⁴ See excerpt Amanda: 1.

much **experience** as men do (21). She supports her argument with scientific information, in terms that women's value should not be assessed only through a membrane, but through their whole person -**I have told him, 'why are men like that?, why can you have all the experience that you want if... if the value of a woman is not the hymen... tell me, but her feelings or anything else** (20-23)-.

As quoted by the participant, her husband's voice simply reinforces such a differential, based exclusively on gender prescriptions of female sexuality, without any further explanation at all -**that women, we have to be more... how could I say?.... I mean, more discreet** (25-26)-.

In this example a very different attitude towards female virginity is shown by Mercedes, because she does not consider it to be a universal rule that has to be obeyed. Rather, she resorts to modern discourses of gender equality and to a sense of injustice, in order to argue for sexual freedom for women. Mercedes' defense of her entitlement to sexual desires and actions implicitly question the notion that sex is bad or evil.

Whether accepted or resisted by participants, this construction of the sexual as evil established a relationship between sexuality and religion, also suggested by their accounts of female virginity as purity and, especially, as somehow sacred.

2.2. Female virginity as sacred.

Although mixed with modern discourses of sexuality and individual entitlement, the relationship of sexual morals to religion was often present in participants' accounts, especially through the notion of virginity as sacred, an idea that was suggested by several constructions of meaning. Among them was the notion that intercourse with a female

virgin polluted and dishonoured her⁵. This depiction of female virginity as sacred is clear in the next excerpt, although the participant states it only in order to question it. Patricia, a 15-year-old virgin girl from Mexico City, describes an argument between her and her mother around religious prescriptions of virginity. These two generations confront each other with different meanings for female sexuality:

1 RESEARCHER: I mean... your mom... what do you think she
2 thinks about sexuality? Your mom, what does she think?
3 PATRICIA: I think my mom thinks as many people do, as
4 if it were the most sacred thing. For instance, those
5 who say 'virginity has to be kept' and I don't think
6 so.
7 R: You don't think so? Why?
8 P: Because if psychological virginity... if, for
9 instance, there are girls that are born without that
10 membrane and... does that mean they are not virgins
11 anymore? or if they fell down, if they hurt themselves
12 and it broke, they haven't stopped being virgins.
13 R: But, psychological virginity?
14 P: Yes, I do care about it.
15 R: It is... what is it?, I mean, how do you define it?
16 P: Well, I define it as virginity, as the membrane, as
17 a preconception, and psychological virginity as if I
18 told you 'I'm still a virgin' and maybe I'm not
19 anymore. And maybe I had an operation and I can tell
20 you I'm not a virgin and, what if I am? Only to fool
21 you, I mean, when I know I'm not a virgin anymore, then
22 I'm not.
23 R: Oh! So you mean that... but, that's important for
24 you to keep, isn't it? ... psychological virginity.
25 Let's say you rode a horse and your hymen broke...
26 would it be important for you to wait until you were
27 married to have intercourse?
28 P: No.
(Patricia: 2)

This dialogue starts with my invitation for Patricia to cite her mother's voice on the issue of sexuality (1-2), but Patricia interprets her mother without quoting her, so she

⁵ See 2.3. Intercourse as pollution, dishonour and shame, in this same chapter.

distances herself from her mother's discourse from the start. Next, she constructs a category of persons that would include her mother, and differentiates herself from their opinion **-my mom thinks as many people do (3)-**.

This voice describes sexuality as **the most sacred thing (4)** and, right away, Patricia offers an example of this qualification: the preservation of virginity. By not agreeing with this opinion **-I don't think so (5-6)-**, the participant constructs herself as an individual subject with the capacity of independent judgment, even opposed to her social group and, by questioning the existence of this prohibition, Patricia depicts herself as a speaker with the same authority as the group's.

She then uses scientific discourse via the concept of **psychological virginity (8)** in order to argue for her position. This way she establishes an opposition between science and religion regarding sexual morals, in which she considers scientific discourse as more truthful than religious discourse. In this same utterance, virginity is spontaneously linked to the female gender **-there are girls that... (9)-** making it evident that the expression **the most sacred thing** was used as a description of female virginity only.

Scientific discourse, in this case anatomy and psychology, is still the main element of Patricia's argument against the sacred dimension of virginity and it is used to challenge the concept spoken by the collective speaker **-if, for instance, there are girls that are born without that membrane does it mean they are not virgins anymore? (8-11)-**. In order to ground her argument, the participant cites examples of accidents in which the narrow concept of virginity as an intact hymen could be challenged (11-12).

This whole argument (8-12) contests the concept of virginity spoken by the voice of the collective speaker, and defends women who lost the most important element of

virginity, the **membrane**, as a result of circumstances other than sexual practice. In any case, this defense, built on the grounds of scientific discourse, does not question the prohibition of sexual initiation, nor its qualification as sacred, but it only tries to reduce the accusation to women whose hymen has been broken only by intercourse and not by accident.

Patricia's next utterance tries to explain her classification of virginity. The first part argues that virginity defined exclusively as an intact hymen, engenders a **preconception** (17), a baseless moral assumption, and that what she calls **psychological virginity** only exists in the word of the woman and does not offer any possibility of empirical proof: it is a statement whose truthfulness is only accessible to herself **-when I know I'm not a virgin anymore, then I'm not** (21-22)-. This secrecy grants women some power to be exercised, in this case, **only to fool you** (20-21).

In the question **would it be important for you to wait until you are married to have intercourse?** (26-27) I introduce an element that Patricia had not mentioned: marriage. Maybe this question tries to make explicit several presuppositions that were present in the dialogue. First, that both speakers conceived **virginity** as the girls' lack of experience of coitus. Second, that **virginity has to be kept** (3) meant its preservation before marriage. Patricia's answer confirms that she shares these suppositions (28).

Summarizing, this excerpt constitutes a dialogue in which the participant quotes her mother's and a collective speaker's voice regarding religious beliefs on virginity, in opposition the voices of anatomy and psychology as scientific discourses. Patricia tries to dismantle the reductionist anatomical definition of virginity in order to question the unfair consequences it brings to girls but, at the same time, her argument makes a division between

'innocent' and 'guilty' loss of virginity that would be defined, of course, by intercourse. Thus, although Patricia seems to question these moral injunctions, she is still subject to them, because she still needs to apply judgments to the events that caused the loss of virginity.

Although this sacred dimension of virginity is often present during the conversations, its relation to Catholicism is not reported explicitly, so that the reason participants argue for the importance of female virginity is the permanence of 'customs' within the communities. The religious rationale for this construction has given way to a vague norm that has no other fundament than social inertia. In this process of secularization, the role of scientific discourses of reproductive physiology, and the social validation of contraception within marriage has been of the utmost importance. However, this transformation does not substitute traditional normativities completely.

Thus, while rural participants seemed to regard virginity as sacred and make it a behaviour guideline to respect it, urban participants constructed this norm precisely as discourse, and sensitive to contestation. However, this relativization does not go as far as to disregard the importance of the prohibition, or even its validity. This is probably why modern discourses of sexual freedom, although present during the conversations, seem to have been incorporated by participants only as rational information, but not necessarily as meanings that inform practice, that is, as subjective experience and action. This could suggest that Catholic sexual meanings are embodied, which makes their transformation a difficult and long-lasting historic process that transcends individual lifetime.

The sacred character of female virginity was not the only religious idea that was present in the accounts;

intercourse as pollution and shame was also a common and important depiction of sexual initiation.

2.3. Intercourse as pollution, dishonour and shame.

The metaphor of sexual practice as pollution and the importance of shame and respect were concepts used by participants, not so often in terms of their religious character, but of their symbolic power to function as social rules for sexual behaviour. As said above, although these concepts are rooted in the meanings of sexuality within Catholicism, participants mentioned them more as part of a lay theory of sexual behaviour than as religious prescriptions, failing to link them to their Catholic origin. This situation led me to consider such accounts as examples of the process of secularization of sexuality that is going on in Mexican culture.

The concept of sex as pollution was suggested to me because in participants' stories and utterances, there were many expressions that regarded sexual intercourse as 'dirty', specially if with a female virgin. However, the universal character of this idea was questioned more often by urban men and women than by those living in rural areas. In the first case, some participants quoted these ideas as others' utterances, rather than as their own, and they distanced themselves from them by trying to construct alternatives that could describe more accurately their experience as individuals with personal choice and intentions.

By contrast, most of rural participants accepted these definitions as truths, but with different degrees of appropriation. The less educated participants uttered them as their own values and mores, while the more educated ones seemed to take them as impersonal and universal rules even though they could brake them, that is, many of them had

clean love to describe a virgin marriage:

1 RESEARCHER: How did you decide [to go]? or... what
2 was the situation? Did you just go there or were you
3 having a drink with your friends or what?
4 EDUARDO: No... when I first went there, [friends]
5 had already told me and... they said... that they
6 had had their own frustrations because the truth
7 was... or I don't remember if they told me
8 afterwards, that the thing is that you feel very
9 frustrated, because the truth is... for instance
10 I... I had other wishes...
11 R: ...what did you expect?
12 E: Well, I dreamed of... of a clean love... a clean
13 couple's love and to get married just like the woman
14 does, right?... I wanted to... to be the same, as
15 they say, to be a virgin, right? and it would have
16 been really beautiful, right? but temptations are
17 different, aren't they?
(Eduardo: 2)

This excerpt comes from a longer conversation in which Eduardo tells me about his first sexual experience. Although I ask about the situation that surrounded the event (1-3), Eduardo chooses to quote his friends' voices instead, talking about their negative emotions during their previous visits to brothels. The use of the word **frustrations** could mean that their expectations were not met -[friends] had already told me and... they said... that they had had their own frustrations (4-6)-.

Eduardo uses the same expression to describe his own disappointment after the experience, because he had certain **wishes** that were not satisfied by the event (8-9). My question inquires further into this issue (10) and he answers by using a metaphor of wishing for a **clean love**, and although he does not yet specify it, this seems to be the opposite of having sex with a prostitute, which would then be considered as 'dirty' love -I dreamed of... of a clean love... a clean couple's love (12-13)-. Without saying yet what such **clean love** would mean, Eduardo goes on describing its characteristics, which would be love and marriage. The verb he uses in Spanish -**llegar**, to arrive- implies an evolutionary idea of couple relationships whose ultimate goal is to be instituted by marriage.

Next, Eduardo makes a gender analogy in which he expresses the wish to do something like a woman does. It is only at the end of this utterance that the concepts of **clean love** and gender are linked to premarital virginity, and thus it seems to be the premarital character of his sexual initiation what he considers dirty -**to get married just like the woman does, right?... I wanted to... to be the same, as they say, to be a virgin** (12-14)-. So, in this brief description Eduardo conceives premarital sex as pollution of a pure condition that consisted of both his and his partner's virginity. The wish **to be the same** as a woman may suggest that for this participant it is a woman's condition to stay a virgin until married, but for men it could be just a choice to be better. In any case, virginity is constructed as a superior and desirable condition.

The last utterance makes reference to certain religious definitions of the dualism flesh-spirit, because the term **temptations** (16) comes from the supposed effect of evil on human beings by inciting them, regardless of their own wishes, to sin. This noun embraces the concept of premarital intercourse as a sin of the flesh. He somehow asks for my understanding by describing **temptations** as unavoidable and therefore known to myself -**but temptations are different, aren't they?** (16-17)-.

This fragment is a testimony in which Eduardo gathers a series of meanings that link virginity, purity and marriage -especially women's-, and premarital intercourse with dirt and evil. This way, female virginity is constructed like a sacred space, and marriage as a religious and social ritual that restores purity.

The conception of sex as pollution forced participants to struggle between these ideas derived from religion, and their conception of sexual experience as 'natural' or 'normal', which seems to have been promoted

by modern scientific and family planning discourses. They often came to compromises and dilemmas not always easy to solve in their experience. This was the case of Soledad, from Mexico City, who tells about the effect of scientific information in her possibility to question sexual practice as dirty:

- 1 RESEARCHER: What would you think of a girl that had
2 sex before she got married?, what would you think?
3 SOLEDAD: You mean, what would I think of the girl?,
4 well I don't think... I mean I wouldn't... I
5 wouldn't be surprised...
6 R: Mmm...
7 S: I wouldn't be surprised... now that they
8 [educators] have told us, we've seen more... I
9 wouldn't be surprised, but I think that before...
10 because there weren't any... how are they called?...
11 uhm... talks about sexuality or something like
12 that...
13 R: Mmm...
14 S: 'Oh!', well, 'they are dirty!'... but, why
15 dirty?, it's one's own body, right?, why should they
16 call them dirty?, but now really...
17 R: And you used to think that it was dirty?
18 S: Oh, yes!, I did before, 'Oh!, she's dirty!',
19 or... 'many men must have had her!' or... pointed at
20 her 'oh!, look at her, have you seen her?, don't
21 hang around with her' or... 'she must go out with
22 many... not only with him but with many more'
23 R: Mmm...
24 S: Mmm... not anymore
25 R: You think differently now?
26 S: ...differently now
(Soledad: 2)

This dialogue starts with my request for Soledad to express a judgment about an imaginary third person, a young woman that would have had intercourse before marriage -**a girl that had sex before she got married** (1-2)-. She answers this question saying that she **wouldn't be surprised** (4-5) which indicates that Soledad can expect such a behaviour and that she would not consider it rare.

Soledad then goes on explaining her reasons for not being **surprised**, based upon what she considers the mind-broadening effect of information about sexuality -**now that they [health promoters] have told us, we've seen more... I wouldn't be surprised but I think that**

before... because there weren't any... how are they called?... uhm... talks about sexuality (7-11)-.

Soledad continues by quoting her own voice before this transformation, thus making a reflexive argument. The adjective with which she would once have described the imaginary girl is **dirty**, but applied to a number of women - '**they are dirty**' (14)-. This plural subject suggests the possibility that Soledad gathered and classified certain non-virgin women as part of a group that could be described by this derogatory adjective. Furthermore, this description compares women with pigs⁶, degrading their human condition into a repulsive animality.

With this metaphor Soledad defined sex itself as **dirty**, as an action that stains and pollutes something that would otherwise be clean. But this is not about an external or limited stain, but as if these women were actually transformed into a different kind of subjects. The cleanliness lies therefore in their virginity and the stain seems to come from intercourse. It is logical to assert, then, that a virgin would be pure and clean and that such assets would be shown by her ignorance and inexperience of sexual relations.

This voice, quoted by Soledad as her own before the change introduced by scientific knowledge, is confronted immediately by what seems her present voice, that claims women's property of their own bodies and their entitlement to free sexual behaviour -**but, why dirty?, it's one's own body, right?** (14-15)-. This inner dialogue between her present and past voices shows her own evaluation of the change produced by scientific information, which can go as far as to entitle women to their body and to defend their autonomy and self-determination, that is, to the construction of themselves as subjects of a sexuality. But a certain hesitation can

⁶ Soledad used **cochinas** to describe these imaginary women. In Spanish, this is another way of calling pigs.

be felt when Soledad finishes this utterance trying to confirm with me if I share her point of view and thus reinforce what seems to be her new construction of meaning (14).

Then, the participant differentiates herself from the judgmental voice whose moral authority she questions because, from her present point of view, there would be no grounds for using such an epithet against such women - **why should they call them dirty?** (14-15)-.

Next, I ask again for further explanation of Soledad's transformation but I do so by applying the derogatory word **-dirty-** to the action, and not to the women who do it **-And you used to think that it was dirty?** (17)-. Soledad refuses to accept this change of subjects and, even though she answers affirmatively to the use of the metaphor, she applies it once more to the women, and not to the act **-Oh, yes! I did before, 'Oh!, she's dirty!** (18)-.

This way, Soledad quotes her own past voice insisting on the fact that there was such a transmutation of the female subject through premarital intercourse. Promiscuity was identified by this voice as the cause of such defilement, associating it with dirtiness **-'many men must have had her'** (19)-. This utterance also shows an immediate conclusion, that is, that if the woman is no longer a virgin, she has had coital experiences with more than one man.

This elaboration could suggest a certain conception of women's sexuality in which to be initiated means to open the gate to an impetuous impulse that could no longer be constrained. Soledad then continues to describe the stigmatization that these women would suffer from an impersonal and collective speaker. This voice is then characterized in a dialogue between two speakers, probably women like herself, who gossip about the girl **-pointed at her 'oh!, look at her!, have you seen her?, don't hang around with her'** (18-21)-. The last

recommendation **-don't hang around with her** (20-21)- could express a kind of fear of contagion, as if sexual practice before marriage was like an infection that could be spread by mere social contact. Furthermore, this fear of contagion implies the notion that a virgin's intercourse before marriage is dangerous and needs to be isolated and controlled, because it is considered a threat to some sort of order that is established and maintained by social relations.

The last part of Soledad's intervention simply insists on the idea that the loss of female virginity before marriage is a certain indicator of previous sexual activity **-'she must go out with many... not only with him but with many more'** (21-22)-.

There are two main processes to be noted in this excerpt's analysis. One is Soledad's intention to construct a voice of her own, against that of the norm, that is, a process of individualization of sexual morals. The other is the power of the metaphor of first sexual intercourse as pollution and danger.

In many accounts, a special case was made for sex workers, who were described as the dirtiest women of all, even as a source of infection (Jorge and Carlos and Fernando), not only because they were not worthy of marriage, which could redeem them from their uncleanness, but also because they charged for their services. Women are to surrender sexually only because of love, and not to pleasure or to money, because the latter corrupts the female body even more than sex. These women were not constructed as subjects of desire nor of pleasure, but only as objects of male sexual needs.

The power of these values seems to be embedded in a close and ancient connection between sexuality and religion that the process of secularization and the influence of modern discourses have not eliminated completely. It is only the awareness of their religious origins that seem lost, because they inherited to families and members of the community the task of

regulating young people's sexuality.

3. Rituals related to first sexual intercourse: danger and the ordering of experience.

Within the accounts, two kinds of rituals were found which, in turn, were consistently linked to gender. In the case of men, both male and female participants spoke of a ritual **for** sexual initiation -the hiring of a sex worker's services during male group gatherings- while in the case of women they told about a ritual **after** sexual initiation, that seemed to repair a damage, through union or marriage. In this section I will discuss both men's initiation stories and women's descriptions of marriage as the only way to repair their fault of premarital sex.

3.1. Rituals of male initiation and their transformation.

The meanings attached to different forms of sexual initiation of male participants show certain inconsistencies between what they reported to be general norms and their own actions and experiences. Most participants of this study, both male and female, agreed on the idea that young men generally start their sexual activity with sex workers, whom they call **prostitutes**. This episode is described as a social event in which a young man is taken to a brothel by a group of older or more experienced men, who provide the setting for him to have intercourse for the first time. As told by some of the men, the meaning of this experience is that it allowed them to be accepted as members of their male peer group and to undergo a profound transformation in their gender identity.

However, although discursively this form of initiation was considered by most participants as a common practice, this was not the actual behaviour of most of the men in this study. In fact, only three of the

eight men that had had intercourse by the time of the conversations, had first intercourse with sex workers (Saúl, Eduardo and Guillermo), while the rest started with their girlfriend, their wife or with an acquaintance in a casual encounter (Armando, Alberto, José, Jorge and Jesús). Also, the four virgin men that participated in the research expressed their wish to start their sexual life with a woman other than a sex worker (Carlos, Fernando, Aurelio and Víctor).

Among other reasons, the ritual character of this practice could lie in the fact that those men who were initiated with a sex worker describe their experience more as responding to their peers' expectations than as fulfilling a personal desire, therefore participating in a socially organized form of sexual initiation. Group pressure had a considerable role in this practice, in the sense that it seemed to be directed to the confirmation of masculine identity and to regulate the boy's sexual practices, regardless of the relationship the young man had with his partner. In this situation the partner was the least important element. However, among those initiated this way, the experience seemed to produce great discomfort although the intended confirmation of gender identity could have been accomplished, which could be the reason for the acute absence of eroticism in these accounts. The negative emotions generated by sexual initiation under this kind of pressure are expressed by Saúl, from the rural areas of Guanajuato, in the next story:

- 1 RESEARCHER: How was your first intercourse? This is
- 2 what I'm trying to investigate, please tell me the
- 3 story. How was it... how did you feel?
- 4 SAUL: Well, the first time it is supposed to be...
- 5 the first time when one gets married...
- 6 R: With your wife, you mean?
- 7 S: Yes...
- 8 R: But I mean your first time...
- 9 S: Oh! My first time, mine?
- 10 R: Yours.
- 11 S: Well, my first time... was terrible, the truth is
- 12 that I had a terrible time, it was terrible.
- 13 R: What happened?

14 S: Well, because I was... I was thrown to the
15 girls... we were thrown to the girls, right? there
16 on the floor, on a little mat there... In the dark,
17 right? And I didn't know anything and I was on top
18 and I was crushing her and she says 'hey! you're
19 crushing me, it's not through there'. Oh! I was so
20 embarrassed, the first word, right? 'You know, it's
21 through here, down here, make yourself comfortable,
22 look, this way' and so on, maybe just a little
23 instruction...
24 R: So you mean that...
25 S: ...they do that for the money...
26 R: ...did she show you where it was through?
27 S: Yes, exactly, yes.
28 R: And then?
29 S: Well, the rest was little by little...
30 R: How did she behave with you, this woman, the
31 first time?
32 S: Fine, she was fine.
33 R: Was she?
34 S: Yes, but I was uncomfortable, I was very
35 uncomfortable.
36 R: Then why did you do it?
37 S: Well, only because of pressure, because of
38 pressure from the others. They say 'come on! it's
39 time for your first communion' and they are there,
40 right at the door, saying 'let's see...' they tell
41 you. You don't... you don't feel OK like that, just
42 like my aunt says, 'you feel very shy', she says.
43 R: Well, yes.
44 S: Very shy, you can't even enjoy it.
45 R: So you couldn't even enjoy it because of the
46 pressure?
47 S: Of course not. You just do it quickly and come
48 out.
49 R: Did you come out quickly?
50 S: Yes, quickly...
51 R: Do you think your friends were waiting for you?
52 S: Yes, of course, all that.
53 R: Did you have to tell them?
54 S: Of course, everything was told, wordy, vulgar,
55 everything was told. 'I did this and that and that',
56 [and it was] good or bad. Others would say 'maybe it
57 was like this or like that...'
58 R: Right, and did they congratulate you or what did
59 they do?
60 S: Yes, oh yes! 'he's brave, he passed his first
61 communion, let's go to the next one'. And within the
62 next week or two we would take another boy...
(Saúl: 4)

This story describes Saúl's experience of first intercourse, for which neither desire nor pleasure were major motivations. His description of the experience is offered in very negative terms. But for some reason, he

says this as if it were a confession, as if he was expected to say that it was a good experience **-the truth is that I had a terrible time** (11-12)-. His next utterance is an account of the details of his initiation. First of all, he constructs himself as a passive subject of the action of others, and his description of the conditions of the encounter suggests that he felt quite uncomfortable, making it difficult for him to experience any pleasure **-I was thrown to the girls... we were thrown to the girls, right? there on the floor, on a little mat there... In the dark** (14-16)-.

He then goes on to describe the couple's interaction during intercourse. First of all, Saúl stresses his lack of knowledge about it, which he considers the cause of his clumsiness **-And I didn't know anything and I was on top and I was crushing her** (16-18)-. He then quotes the sex worker's voice, who tries to prevent getting hurt by him and to show Saúl how the penis is to be inserted in the vagina **-and she says 'hey! you're crushing me, it's not through there'** (18-19)-. However, this idea is only implied in his utterance, and thus he seems to believe that he and I have a shared understanding about what he meant by **through there**, referring to the woman's bodily orifices. Thus, Saúl constructs me as a knowledgeable person on the subject of sexual intercourse.

He then describes his feelings about this short verbal interaction as embarrassment because he showed his inexperience and he seemed to be expected to know (19-20). He then goes on quoting the woman's voice teaching and pampering him during the encounter, confirming that the sex worker would have a sexual knowledge that he lacked (20-23). He offers an explanation of the woman's behaviour as being a part of her job **-they do that for the money** (25)-.

Although Saúl evaluates the sex worker's performance positively, he returns to his negative feelings (34-35) and his insistence seems to trigger a question from me,

which points to a contradiction: if he felt bad about the situation, why did he carry on with it? (36). His answer confirms his first utterances in the sense that he did not want this situation, but that he surrendered to others' pressures, expressed through his peers' voices that speak about sexual initiation as if it were a religious event: the **first communion**, thus implying that the experience is itself a ritual (37-39).

This ritual seems to include different forms of surveillance: Saúl reacts to the uneasiness produced by the presence of his friends at the time of intercourse, as if they were evaluating his sexual performance (38-53). The ritual continues with Saul telling the story to his friends, right after intercourse, which is mandated by an omnipresent speaker, who would also evaluate the results of the experience **-everything was told, wordy, vulgar, everything was told. 'I did this and that and that', [and it was] good or bad** (54-56)-.

The last part of the ritual is the granting of a new attribute brought about by sexual initiation. This attribute is, in Saul's words, courage, thus defining the experience as a sort of dangerous quest that he had accomplished successfully. This possible meaning implies that first sexual practice is dangerous, and that it could be considered as a passage from one social status to another, very probably, from boyhood to manhood **-'he's brave, he passed his first communion'** (60-61)-.

In this example, a boy's first sexual intercourse was depicted as a public affair, performed in a collective situation in which the group of peers admitted a new member that could prove his prowess as a man through erection and penetration. Sexual demonstrations like these ones are central in the affirmation of masculine identity among Mexican men, as several qualitative studies have shown (Liendro 1995, Bronfman and Minello 1995, Liguori 1995). For boys, sex is not always an expression of eroticism, but one of the main ways of representing and asserting masculinity to other

men. In this sense, this kind of experience offers a ritual for confirming manhood, because it is through sexuality that masculine power is measured and expressed, albeit masculinity needs to be constantly proved and is never totally given⁷.

In other cases, male participants' sexual initiation resulted from an individual decision, even in contradiction to dominant rituals of male sexual initiation. Some of these events happened because of opportunity (Alberto and Jorge), or as a result of conscious decision (Armando, José, and Jesús). These differences coincide with participants' age and place of residence: rural male participants older than 20 hired the services of a sex worker while those younger and urban stated their preference to be initiated with a girlfriend⁸. These differences among participants may show that the meanings of male sexual initiation are undergoing a transformation toward less demand of male sexual performance, and to the establishment of emotional bonds between partners. These issues could sometimes delay initiation, or even promote a more careful selection of the partner.

In any case, what seems to be evidenced in these cases is the possible influence of discourses of modernity, disseminated through the media and the school, in the sense that gender equality has legitimized women's sexual desire as well, making them more accessible to intercourse out of wedlock. Also, health programmes related to AIDS prevention seem to have influenced

⁷ Díaz (forthcoming) considered that among the participants of his study there is a close connection between masculinity, penetration and erection. Likewise, other studies have gathered expressions from young virgin men that showed fear and anxiety for the size of their penises and the achievement of erection during first intercourse (Rodríguez, Amuchástegui, Rivas and Bronfman 1995).

⁸ According to different studies carried out recently in Mexico, there is a tendency of change in the kind of partner that young men are choosing for their first intercourse. While the stereotype speaks of initiation with a sex worker, the boys interviewed for a study on male sexual initiation declared more frequently to have their first experience with a friend, in less numbers with a girlfriend, a casual acquaintance, and a prostitute as the rarest initiation partner (Leñero 1990:89*).

younger participants' rejection of initiation with sex workers, because they construct them as a source of disease.

In this context, the possibilities of couples' dialogue about issues like the situation of initiation, sexual desire and even contraception, seem to increase considerably. This is the case of Aurelio, a 15 year-old virgin student from Mexico City, who came to talk to me in order to get information about contraception for his future first intercourse with his girlfriend:

- 1 RESEARCHER: What have you [he and his girlfriend]
2 talked about?
3 AURELIO: Well, we have seen books about
4 contraceptive methods... and one of the easiest is
5 the rhythm, it seems easy and we don't worry.
6 R: What are you worried about?
7 A: Worried... I'm scared.
8 R: About what?
9 A: That she can get pregnant.
10 R: Have you talked about it? That's good.
11 A: Yes, I've talked with her about it a lot.
12 R: And she also wants [to have sex]...
13 A: Yes.
14 R: What other methods have you discussed?
15 A: There are several of them, but we looked at those
16 two, the condom and the rhythm.
17 R: Couldn't she consult a doctor to see which is
18 best?
19 A: Well, you know... we don't know where and who to
20 go to, but we have thought about it.
21 R: Maybe you could go to the local clinic and ask
22 about contraception or you could use the condom, but
23 I don't think you are very convinced... what is it
24 that makes both of you nervous, intercourse itself,
25 not only pregnancy, but the situation itself?
26 A: Yes.
27 R: Sure. If you've never done it... what is it that
28 scares both of you the most, pregnancy or
29 intercourse?
30 A: Well, we're nervous because of the situation and
31 also, right now there is a lot of fear about AIDS.
32 R: Yes, you're right, is she [scared as well]?
33 A: Well... also our families have almost the same
34 customs.
35 R: What do you mean?
36 R: Well... that girls shouldn't marry young, that
37 they shouldn't do this or that, bla bla bla... but
38 they will tell us 'now you have to calm down' or
39 later, in case of pregnancy... I mean, I could tell
40 her 'OK, we'll get married', but in case of
41 pregnancy...
42 R: What, in case of pregnancy?

43 A: I mean, I've told her there would be no problem.
44 R: That you would support her, but you'd prefer it
45 didn't happen?
46 A: Right
(Aurelio: 1)

This dialogue starts with a question about a previous utterance by Aurelio, in which he informed me that he and his girlfriend had talked about the possibility of having sex. As told by the participant, this situation suggests that the couple could accept their desire as legitimate and therefore see themselves as entitled to satisfy it, and it also constructed them as sexual subjects that assess the consequences of their sexual activity. In a way, Aurelio describes himself and his partner as rational individuals with a choice, because their approach to sex anticipates and calculates the risks it conveys, according to scientific knowledge - **we have seen books about contraceptive methods... and one of the easiest is the rhythm** (3-5)-. In this sense, Aurelio sees himself as a sovereign individual that assumes his responsibilities and who grounds his decisions and actions on the truths of science: he considers that this kind of knowledge warns him against the consequences of intercourse.

In my next question I let him know that I do not understand what his fear is about (6), and his answer finally specifies that it is about pregnancy, thus considering it an undesirable outcome of the exercise of sexuality (9). I then shift the focus of the conversation to the negotiation process that Aurelio has reported and give it a positive judgment, therefore supporting the values of rationality, responsibility, gender equality and negotiation -**Have you talked about it? That's good** (10)-. I finally go back to the subject of Aurelio's preoccupation: pregnancy and contraception (14) and support his trust in science by suggesting to consult a doctor, but I do so making the girl responsible for prevention (17). This question shows a contradiction in my own discourse for gender equality, because I make it

only the girl's matter to prevent pregnancy, although Aurelio is also concerned about it.

His answer may show that, even though he relies on medical discourse, he feels that there are no real conditions for him to benefit from it **-we don't know where and who to go to, but we have thought about it** (19-20)-.

My next utterance is a suggestion of contraceptive action as well as a question about the possibility that it could not only be pregnancy what they fear, but intercourse itself (21-25).

Although apparently Aurelio accepts this definition (26), he insists that their preoccupation is greater for consequences than for intercourse itself, and this time it is AIDS he fears **-we're nervous... of the situation and also later, right now there is a lot of fear about AIDS** (30-31)-. Another consequence he foresees is related to both their families and their **customs** (33-34). This expression could mean that Aurelio fears that his sexual activity could somehow be known by the families, as if he could not keep it a private matter.

But it is only after my asking for clarification (35) that he starts quoting indirectly the families' voices and therefore explaining the reasons for his fear. One of them consists of a prohibition specifically applied to girls. This prohibition refers to early marriage, therefore making an inexorable link between female sexual initiation and formal union **-that girls shouldn't marry young** (36)-. The second quotation of the families' voice is again a prohibition for girls and, although it is not explicit, what seems to be forbidden is the girls' sexual activity. It is interesting, however, that he does not mention sex, but uses demonstrative pronouns to talk indirectly about it **-that they shouldn't do this or that** (36-37)-. Finally, pregnancy appears like an issue that is worthy of the families' intervention (37-39).

This time, Aurelio stops citing others and constructs himself as the subject of the fear of pregnancy by quoting his own voice in a hypothetical situation. The solution he offers to the predicament of pregnancy is again marriage, thus assuming the families' prescription of the inescapable link between sexual initiation and union -**I could tell her 'OK, we'll get married', but in case of pregnancy** (39-41)-. However, this expression puts the girl in a disadvantaged position within the relationship, because she is supposed to need his acceptance -**I've told her there would be no problem** (43)-. My final utterance only rephrases his expression in terms of **support**, again making the girl responsible to carry on with the possible pregnancy and giving the boy the opportunity to choose whether or not to commit to her.

This dialogue shows the effects of the mixture of two different discourses upon subjective experience of sexual initiation. While family planning and health discourses seem to support individual choice and responsibility, moral prescriptions spoken by the family get in the way of actually exercising them. What this excerpt illustrates is the way in which this urban young man is dealing with modern demands of gender equality and sexual freedom, in a context where traditional morals are strongly held and where there are no social nor material conditions to exercise such choice.

This example of sexual initiation is characterized by the personalized and stable relationship between partners, which contrasts sharply with the ritual of impersonal and detached initiation with a sex worker, in that it is non-ritualistic, so that peer group pressure is not present, at least not discursively. Several questions remain about the conditions that allow for such an initiation, as well as about its subjective effects in terms of male identity. For instance, modern discourses of gender equality could be allowing male identity to be constructed through means other than sexual prowess and

group ritual, and for the individualization of the experience, in terms of the establishment of an emotional bond between sexual partners. However, this does not mean that the men that are choosing to start their sexual activity this way are not subject to the contradictions inherent to the presence of diverse moral systems because for most participants, men's virginity at a certain age was considered a sign of dubious masculine identity, whether or not they themselves felt insecure about their masculinity. Men were expected to have intercourse before marriage, because of the teaching role they are expected to play with their brides. Although this prescription props up male power within gender relationships, it also subjects men to a requirement of sexual competence and performance that is difficult to fulfil and that rarely responds to their wishes. Furthermore, if their desire and experience does not agree with this expectation of indiscriminate and early intercourse, it can even question their identity as men. Perhaps the other forms of sexual initiation are signaling the possibility of constructing male identity from different elements than sexual prowess, which could allow for a more equal relationship between partners. In the case of this research, this possibility seemed to be related to the participants' degree of self-differentiation from their social group, facilitated by modern discourses of gender equality and sexual freedom.

3.2. Rituals that repair women's loss of virginity.

Across all sites, the defloration of a virgin was considered the man's responsibility, and he was obliged to marry her in order to repair the damage. If he failed to fulfil his obligation, the girl would stay polluted and stigmatized, and she would lose her opportunity to have a legitimate husband. In turn, the man would be regarded as coward and abusive, and without honour. This construction was quite consistent in the accounts,

although it was not always obeyed. This was the case of Soledad, a young mother from Mexico City, who tells about how her community holds virginity as a valuable asset for marriage, and how its loss could help to enforce the marriage to the man:

1 RESEARCHER: Why do you think [your parents] had more
2 control over you [than over your brothers]? Why do
3 you think they were so worried?
4 SOLEDAD: Well, I guess because I was a woman,
5 because I am a woman.
6 R: What does that have to do with it?
7 S: Well... I think that they thought that if I went
8 out... they were going to be all over me, that I
9 would lose my virginity... Or they would worry about
10 gossip. If they saw a girl or they saw me talking
11 [with a boy]... 'that one has slept with so and
12 so'... 'that one has slept with so and so'... and
13 gossip, and they would point at you... Of course,
14 the man loses the same thing, doesn't he? because...
15 they would say that maybe... that because we would
16 go to certain places or because they [men] were
17 smart... that if they wanted to they could dishonour
18 you... That's what they thought.
19 R: And, what would be the problem if you lost your
20 virginity?... or of being dishonoured?... what is
21 the problem with that? why do they worry so much
22 about it?
23 S: Well, my parents... my mom would tell me often
24 that... when... when the girl loses her virginity...
25 if she loses it with the man she is going to marry
26 she's made it, but if not...
27 R: What do you mean 'she's made it'?
28 S: Well, that she's going to be fine...
29 R: ...that she's going to be fine? that she's got
30 him?
31 S: Right, because if she is going to be married to
32 the man that dishonoured her, he's going to respect
33 her... but that isn't true. I mean, I don't think
34 that way, it's a lie because, for example, if he
35 dishonours you... well... you are not always
36 dishonoured by the man who will get married to you.
37 But virginity is not very important... he could, he
38 could still hit you.

(Soledad: 3)

In this excerpt, Soledad constructs a polyphony about the value of female virginity for marriage, with the voices of those figures that control women's sexuality in her community. The exchange starts with a question in which I ask the participant for the reasons

her parents had to control her, and she uses gender as the explanation (1-5). For Soledad, the gendered aspect of this control is related to her parents' concern about a particular danger to which she was supposedly exposed when outside the home: the risk of being touched by men and of losing her virginity **-they thought that if I went out... they were going to be all over me, that I would lose my virginity** (7-9)-. This sentence suggests two different interpretations: first, that to be a single sexually experienced woman is constructed by these voices as dangerous, although it is not clear why, and second, that the family, specially the parents, are in charge of keeping their daughters' virginity.

Soledad goes on describing different methods of surveillance of women's sexual behaviour that she has detected in her community, which include **gossip** and observation (10). By quoting an impersonal speaker, the participant shows how control is exerted: even a girl's conversation with a boy could indicate that she has had sex with him. This seems to be a dreadful accusation because it produces a stigma over the girl, albeit not over the boy **-If they saw a girl or they saw me talking [with a boy]... 'that one has slept with so and so'** (10-12)-.

Soledad then uses her own voice in order to point out this gender inequality and to corroborate it with me, which means that she somehow protests against the unilateral control of women's behaviour **-Of course, the man loses the same thing, doesn't he?** (13-14)-. Her next description of the situation is an indirect quotation that constructs men as the perpetrators of a scheme, and women as passive victims of such action. She finally describes the loss of virginity as **dishonour -because they [men] were smart... that if they wanted to they could dishonour you** (16-18)-. Single non-virgin girls are considered, by these voices, as women without honour and thus without social value.

My next question asks Soledad about the consequences of this loss (19-22), and she answers by quoting her parents indirectly saying that there is only one condition by which the non-virgin girl can be safe, and that is to have lost her virginity with the man who would be her husband, otherwise, she will never have his respect. A sort of paradox is portrayed here in that the man that **dishonours** a virgin is precisely the one to respect her later as the result of the ritual of marriage -**because if she is going to be married to the man that dishonoured her, he's going to respect her** (31-33)-. Soledad then situates herself against this parental discourse by considering it a **lie** because, for her, virginity does not guarantee the absence of mistreatment by the husband (33-35). There is also a hint of disobedience in this utterance in the suggestion that girls do not always lose their virginity to the men they marry, and that this could be a reason for further abuse -**you are not always dishonoured by the man who will get married to you. But virginity is not very important... he could, he could still hit you** (35-38)-.

In this dialogue, Soledad describes the prescription of men's respect and obligation toward female virginity, but she also questions it in terms of its efficacy to fulfil its purpose: to get a husband. The inconsistencies of this mandate are thus pointed out in this example. The excerpt also portrays sex with a virgin as **dishonour**, which implies that the intact female body has a high moral value and that intercourse makes her lose such status.

It seems that the single non-virgin woman entails some sort of danger which would be, as derived from the stories, that she has been initiated to the world of sexuality without being appropriated by the man who could control her, therefore exposing herself to reproduction of dubious paternity⁹. In this sense, the ritual described

⁹ When discussing the social construction of adolescent pregnancy as a problem, Nathanson (1991) argues that:

above produces a socially legitimated way for non-virgin girls to pass from this state of dangerous transition to the institutionalized state of cohabitation or marriage, within which their sexuality can be controlled and managed.

However, the transformation of gender relationships brought about by modern discourses has produced a discursive possibility of individual sexual choice for both men and women, although often the social and cultural conditions do not actually allow it. In the case of this study, young men from rural communities expressed a dilemma: they wish not to be initiated with a sex worker, but to do so with a girl from the same town would put them at risk of being forced to marry her (Carlos y Fernando). Two of the older men from Oaxaca (Eduardo and Jorge) felt obliged to get married to the girl they deflowered in order to repair their deed. This situation suggests that the social possession of the female body by the man protects her from stigma, because it constraints her exercise of her sexuality and reproduction to the institution of marriage. Consequently, some women are described as strategic by losing their virginity with the man they want to marry, as a means to ensure such bond. This was the case as told by Eduardo, from Oaxaca:

- 1 RESEARCHER: How did you do it? It's not easy here in
- 2 town.
- 3 EDUARDO: Well, she's got friends and... well... they
- 4 invited me to get wood from the forest, and then
- 5 I... I didn't go to bring wood, I went to get her,
- 6 right? And we ran away...
- 7 R: And, did she accept to have sex?
- 8 E: No, it was almost... I demanded a lot, right? I

The 'immorality' to which the adolescent pregnancy label draws attention is not primarily reproductive, but sexual. Pregnancy can be terminated by abortion, but there is no action that can eliminate the association of pregnancy with sexual activity: It is its evocation of nonmarital sexuality rather than nonmarital childbearing that gives the adolescent pregnancy label its symbolic force (Nathanson 1991:5).

9 was the one who demanded it... I had changed a lot
10 from my first girlfriend. That's why I told you...
11 when I married her, even after I had contact with
12 her, I didn't... I didn't love her like... like I
13 dreamed I would, right? But it happened almost as if
14 we were playing...
15 R:... but, why did she take that risk? Was she a
16 virgin when you had sex with her?
17 E: Well, to tell you the truth, I don't know. It's
18 hard because... we did it standing up, right? so it
19 was difficult to know and I am not experienced...
20 well... about how does it feel if she were a virgin.
21 R: You don't know?
22 E: No, I don't, only theoretically, right?... I know
23 that she reacted in a certain way... well, I think,
24 the first time she complained...
25 R: ...it hurt?
26 E: Yes... and I couldn't penetrate her... hard
27 because it hurt, right? Her reaction, to tell the
28 truth, I didn't know anything, so for me, that I
29 didn't know anything but that I had only the
30 intention to... I was... only playing, I didn't
31 know.. it was only a pastime and I was going to
32 leave her maybe... that's what I was thinking.
33 R: Why did you decide not to leave her?
34 E: When we got married... when we ran away then I
35 decided... when I told her... 'you're going to marry
36 me'... I'd never told her I was going to marry her
37 so, when I told her 'we're getting married now', she
38 said 'yes', so, from that moment on I... I had that
39 responsibility... and I didn't have the idea to
40 leave her anymore.
41 R: Was this before you ran away?
42 E: I mean, the moment I ran away with her, I knew I
43 could not back down, that I was going to respond as
44 a husband.
(Eduardo: 3)

In this dialogue Eduardo tells the story of his first intercourse with the girl who would later be his wife, as well as his intentions and feelings. The first part of the excerpt describes the girl as an active pursuer of Eduardo's attention, and her strategies to get it (1-6). As told by him, it was the boy's task, however, to convince her to have intercourse, to which she refused strongly at the beginning (7-9). Next, Eduardo links this encounter to marriage, stressing that intercourse was not planned, thus stating that he did not intent to marry the girl and that the absence of love was his main reason for his refusal **-when I married her, even after I had contact**

with her, I didn't... I didn't love her like... like I dreamed I would, right? But it happened almost as if we were playing (10-14)-.

My next question asks for an explanation of what I consider the girl's risky behaviour, which is her active loss of virginity (15-16). Eduardo admits that he cannot be sure of her virginity because he had no previous experience about it, but he uses her expressions of pain as the only evidence **-she reacted in a certain way... well, I think, the first time she complained (22-24)-**. However, the participant seems to be more interested in talking about his intentions than about his partner's virginity. His definition of sex includes pleasure and joy with no consequences to him, as shown by his idea of playing and **leaving her** after the event, which implies that she was not the one to decide whether to stay together or not **-I was... only playing, I didn't know... it was only a pastime and I was going to leave her maybe (30-32)-**. I do not question this power differential and try to explore his reasons to change his intention and marry her (33). His answer does not mention any desire or wish to do so, but only his actual behaviour. It seems that his only reason to get married was the responsibility he acquired by proposing to her and by running away with her, as an obligation to repair the damage against dishonour (34-40). His description is dramatic in terms that he gained an obligation that went against his feelings and desires but that protected the girl and himself against further social stigma **-the moment I ran away with her, I knew I could not back down, that I was going to respond as a husband (42-44)-**.

In this story Eduardo tells about the process of his marriage as the result of his obligation to repair both his and the girl's reputation after intercourse. This kind of ritual was found in all three communities, although its name changed. Although in Oaxaca it is called 'to steal' the girl, she actually accepts and

plans it, as evidenced by the **Zapotecos'** stories, who express her participation and consent to be 'stolen'. The inconsistency between the actual position of the girl and the name of the ritual seems to show the need to keep gender hierarchy, at least discursively, because it is the man's activity and the girl's passivity -'to steal the girl'- that are portrayed.

In Oaxaca, this ritual consists of the man taking the girl to his parents' house, secretly at night, without telling the girl's family. The next morning the **huehuete**, who is the ceremonial elder of the community, tells the girl's parents about the stealing. Later, the man's family goes to the girl's family in order to make her parents aware of the damage done, taking valuable gifts like fruit, candles and food. A party is then thrown in order to legitimate the new couple.

In Guanajuato the same ritual is carried out, but it is called 'runaway', a name that constructs both partners as equally responsible and free to carry on the action, without any coercion from the man. However, it does not include the efforts to 'content' the bride's family, although some parties may be thrown, maybe because this town is poorer than the community in Oaxaca, and because it lacks an ethnic identity that needs to be supported by traditional rituals of marriage.

González Montes (1995) has analyzed the literature about changes in Mexican indigenous customs regarding marriage, and she found that four major elements have been transformed during this century: 1) the age of marriage increased, especially in those communities that were involved in non-agricultural waged labour and education; 2) the intervention of parents in partner selection decreased, which has been favored by migration, 3) the complex ritual of 'mesoamerican model' of marriage (González Montes 1995:4*) that took about three or four years for the couple to be married, has been gradually substituted for a shorter and cheaper 'stealing' or 'runaway' and finally, 4) brides' price has been

transformed from the boy's long-term labour to money, or it has simply disappeared:

Although the 'stealing' has always been an option when there were difficulties for marriage, in the last two or three decades it has become the most common form of initiating cohabitation in rural areas. The reasons most frequently argued are economic in character, because of the high costs of rituals that surround betrothal and wedding. But, more than the influence of economic factors, the increase of unions by stealing/runaway is also due to the desire of young people to impose, through consummated actions, their will to their elders, avoiding their intervention in partner selection (González Montes 1995:29*).

The increase of runaways is considered by this author as a symptom of the weakening of parental authority that seems to be related to work and educational options for young people in rural areas.

Thus, most of the participants of this research, started living together as a result of running away. However, while in both rural communities cohabitation came as result of intercourse, in Mexico City it only happened when pregnancy occurred (Mercedes and Soledad). This could mean that urban participants could feel freer to explore sexuality without having to commit to each other, as long as there was no pregnancy, while the rule in rural areas is independent of such outcome.

In any case, the ritual that instates cohabitation, be it marriage or not, appears as a restitution of a sacred thing that was made profane by intercourse: female virginity. With this ceremony, whatever its characteristics, the previous order is restored. As Douglas (1966) says:

By ritual and speech what has passed is restated so that what ought to have been prevails over what was, permanent good intention prevails over temporary aberrations (Douglas 1966:68).

However, transgression was not the exception to the rule, but precisely the most common practice. All participants talked about the inconsistencies between the moral values and the actual behaviour of young people, but did not offer any explanation about it. At first

sight, this could mean that the rule is quite inefficient, because it is rarely obeyed. But a closer look may show that it is precisely thanks to transgression that the prescription exists, in a reciprocal determination of each other. So, as marriage rituals became more expensive, a good solution to this difficulty was the 'stealing' or the 'runaway', because it allowed marriages to occur without so much expense and without questioning the discursive morality of the communities. By holding virginity as sacred and sexuality as evil, and at the same time not punishing harshly those that violated these precepts, these communities could preserve their cultural identities. Thus, instead of transforming traditional sexual culture, people could blame transgression upon individuals. Discursive righteousness and practical permissiveness seem to produce, in this example, a curious effect of cultural resistance to modernity.

This does not mean, however, that the strength of these injunctions is lost. On the contrary, the sense of fault and sin was general among participants who had sex before marriage, although they still did it.

Although most of the constructions discussed here are closely related to Catholic mores and images of gender, the power of modern discourses to shape individuals' accounts is shown by the confusions, mixes and contradictions that participants expressed in their sexual experiences.

One of the most dramatic evidences of these clashes is shown by participants' behaviour in relation to contraception and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, because none of them used any protection during their first intercourse. Many times, cultural constructions regarding gender and sexuality that surrounded this practice came between the desire to prevent and actually doing it. In the case of single women, to anticipate and plan a sexual encounter was not considered morally acceptable for a virgin, so that, when

faced with the opportunity, they all exposed themselves to the risk of pregnancy or of sexually transmitted diseases. Their dilemma was difficult: if they accepted to have sex, they risked pregnancy but, if they used contraception, they would be considered knowledgeable and experienced, which would give them a bad reputation and put their marital future at stake. Their solution to this dilemma was often to rush into intercourse without considering consequences, because they often constructed pregnancy as a better situation than to be exposed to the loss of status. At least, motherhood could redeem them of their fault, while preventing it would be an explicit acceptance of sexual pleasure, which they are not supposed to desire if they want to stay within the realm of women eligible for marriage.

In the case of men, although sexually transmitted diseases were thought to be spread mainly by sex workers, none of the participants that were initiated in this way used any prevention. The reasons they argued were, on the one hand, their lack of information about contraception and risk infection and, on the other hand, the impossibility to plan because of the urge they felt. Only Jesús, from Mexico City, who was initiated with his girlfriend, used some prevention against pregnancy, because of his intention to fulfil a life project that would be hindered by a child.

On the contrary, the boys that started this way in rural areas considered that not to use contraception was a proof of love for their partners, because they seemed willing to put themselves at risk of fatherhood and respond to the girl, that is, to marry her and be responsible for the child. To use contraception in a context like this meant their lack of love and commitment.

3.3. **Virginity, the sacred and ritual: theoretical comments.**

The presence of a moral dimension of sexuality within all conversations of this research led me to look for theoretical referents that could help to understand it. Since this subject is a matter for different disciplines, the framework I built was not based upon a single school of thought but by several of them, mainly from history and anthropology. In this section I will briefly discuss the usefulness of Bataille's work (1992) on the relationship between sexuality and the sacred, Van Gennep's (1969) and Douglas' theories of ritual, and Warner's (1991) research on the history of the cult of female virginity as defined by Catholicism. Although these authors have little in common, they provided a set of concrete and clear ideas precisely on the subject of this chapter: the moral dimension of sexuality and its relationship to religion.

Firstly, Bataille's work (1992) offers a theory to understand the association between sexuality and the sacred, in his analysis of Catholicism in Western culture, although he generalized his conclusions to other cultures and epochs.

For him, to study the history of eroticism means to study religion as well, because there is a universal regulation of sexual activity based upon religious beliefs. Such a barrier against eroticism is grounded in the fact that:

...what is at stake in eroticism is always the dissolution of constituted forms. I repeat: of those forms of social, regular life that institute the discontinuous order of defined individualities that we are (Bataille 1992:32*).

Bataille calls these prohibitions 'interdicts' (1992:46*), and he says that they were established in early ages against the dead, and against sexuality and reproduction, because death and reproduction are, in this author's view, a threat to individual discontinuity and

to society.

The only true reason we have for admitting the ancient existence of such an interdict is the fact that, in every era, just as in every place, to the extent that we are informed, man is defined by a sexual conduct submitted to rules, to defined restrictions: man is an animal that remains 'interdict' before death, and before sexual union (Bataille 1992:72*).

However, Bataille accepts that this 'shapeless and universal interdict' has variations throughout cultures and epochs.

The need to regulate sexual activity emerged from the need to preserve the world of work, which is the regulated and transparent world of the profane. According to this author, before and outside Western Christianity, eroticism and sexual activity were regarded as sacred because they offered the possibility of continuity between beings. The feast was the privileged space for the sacred, through the organization of rituals of transgression. By opening spaces that signaled the opportunity to experience certain forms of eroticism banned from everyday life, the profane world of work was preserved.

This would be, for example, the place of the sacred prostitutes whose rituals helped the mortals to be in touch with the Gods.

Mexican history has its own example of this concept of sexuality as sacred. As said before¹⁰, in Mexica culture there were two divinities that could embody what we now call sexuality: **Xochiquetzal** and **Tlazolteotl**. **Xochiquetzal** was the patroness goddess of illicit sexual relations and **Tlazolteotl** was the protectress of fertility, as well as of abortion. They both were offered rituals of confession of sexual faults and, in exchange, they gave their forgiveness (Marcos 1989, Quezada 1989). Besides this sacred aspect of sexuality, prehispanic civilizations also had a strict code for sexual activity,

¹⁰ See chapter I: **The hybrid construction of sexuality in Mexico.**

which shared some aspects with Christianity, like the recommendation to restrain from erotic excesses (Gruzinsky 1987). But sexuality was not regarded as sinful, but as a comfort that gods granted mortals in order to alleviate the suffering of this life, with the warning that it should not be abused.

In pagan religions such as the latter, the sacred included both the pure and the impure, but Christianity rejected the impure and made it part of the world of the profane.

Eroticism fell into the field of the profane at the same time that it was severely condemned. The evolution of eroticism is parallel to that of impurity. The assimilation of Evil is common to the repudiation of a sacred character (Bataille 1992:172*).

Thus the Catholic Church opposed eroticism and grounded its damnation in a profane character ascribed to Evil. One of the expressions of such Evil was clearly determined as sexual activity outside marriage, since family became one of the most important institutions to be defended by the Church. Therefore, the sacred was reduced to the God of Goodness and, since there could be nothing impure in Him, sexuality was separated from divinity.

Bataille's historic approach to the history of the sacred dimension of sexuality and its Fall into the worldly space of the profane served to explain the kind of constructions of meaning that participants offered during the conversations, especially the metaphors of sex as evil, and virginity as sacred.

There are, however, two problems with Bataille's work. One is that it tends to universalize this process of separation of the sacred, which does not solve the question about its application to the particular Catholicism that was brought to America by the Spanish, and that intended to crush previous Indian religions, although it did not success completely. There remains the need to trace and understand the links between the

Catholic sacred and the Indians' sacred, as well as the process of their interaction during the last 500 years. However, Bataille's ideas helped me to understand participants' association of sexuality with evil in terms of how sexuality fell into the world of the profane within Catholicism.

The second problem is that Bataille considers sexuality as natural, impulsive and almost instinctive, so that culture needs to control and regulate its expression. This idea is precisely what Foucault has criticized with the concept of the historical construction of sexuality. Nevertheless, whether the sexual is an impulse or not, I still consider valid Bataille's argument about the universal regulation of sexual behaviour, especially because it is linked to reproduction.

As illustrated by Bataille (1992), the relationship between the sacred and the profane has been a preoccupation for all cultures. The importance of these issues for social life seems to be so great, that they have also been discussed by major sociologists like Durkheim (1965), whose work on religion inaugurated a definite trend within sociological thought.

For Durkheim (1965), the difference between the sacred and the profane does not only reside in the hierarchical notion that the sacred is superior to the profane, but in the fact that there is an absolute difference between them, because that separation is necessary in order to avoid pollution and danger:

The traditional opposition between good and bad is nothing beside this; for the good and the bad are only two opposed species of the same class, namely morals, just as sickness and health are two different aspects of the same order of facts, life, while the sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two different classes, as two worlds between which there is nothing in common (Durkheim 1965:54).

The existence of the sacred calls for a regulation of its relationship to the profane, in order to prevent

their mixing and, thus, the loss of specificity of the sacred. The ways in which this is done is through the creation and enforcement of interdicts and rituals, that is, of prohibitions and socially prescribed behaviours that maintain the two worlds separate and closed to one another. The profane cannot and should not touch the sacred if it does not want powerful and uncontrollable forces to be unleashed. This notion derives from what Durkheim calls the 'extraordinary contiguousness of a sacred character' (1965:358):

...the sacred world is inclined, as it were, to spread itself into the same profane world, which it excludes elsewhere: at the same time that it repels it, it tends to flow into it as soon as it approaches. This is why it is necessary to keep them at a distance from one another and to create a sort of vacuum between them (Durkheim 1965:358).

The sacred is so necessary and universal to social life, because of the emotions of comfort and dependence that are linked to it, which, in fact, are so intense that become contagious themselves, spreading and constituting social relations.

However, the fact that these domains need to be kept separate in order to maintain social order, does not mean that a person or **being** (Durkheim 1965:54) cannot pass from one of them to the other. Rather, this indicates that whoever or whatever travels from one dimension to the other needs to do so in an orderly manner which is provided by the ritual, in which the gestures, movements and language of the world of the profane are excluded and differentiated so as to keep the separation between the two realms. Durkheim illustrates such notion with what he calls 'initiation rites' (1965:54) in which a person suffers a transmutation, a re-birth, in his/her passage from one domain to the other. It is this kind of ritual that participants of this research described when a young man gets sexually initiated by a prostitute.

Although Durkheim's work has been fundamental in the understanding of religion, Van Gennep's (1960) ideas on rituals offered me a more detailed framework for the

interpretation of the rituals found in this research, because he conceives of individuals' socially regulated transits from one world to another as 'rites of passage'. Van Gennep's (1960) definition of these social processes is that:

...every change in a person's life involves actions and reactions between the sacred and the profane - actions and reactions to be regulated and guarded so that society as a whole will suffer no discomfort or injury. Transitions from group to group and from one situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings... For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally defined (van Gennep 1960:3).

According to this concept, society is organized like a territory in which the passage from one space to another needs to be socially regulated and legitimated, because it imposes a certain organization to which different groups accommodate. These rituals offer a setting in which individuals go through the transformations that are needed to construct an identity, which turns them into another member of a particular social group.

Van Gennep considers that all rites of passage can be subdivided into 'rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation' (Van Gennep 1960:11). In order for an individual to travel between the sacred and the profane, he/she needs first to be separated from the world he/she is coming from. He/she then enters a phase of non-definition, in which he/she is neither what he/she was, nor what he/she is to become next, so that a period of isolation is needed. Finally, a third rite incorporates the person to the new social status he/she is to possess.

These phases are general to all rites of passage which, by the way, correspond to different phases of the life cycle. As said above, in this research the notion of initiation rite was applied to the way in which

participants reported that men were generally initiated, that is, with sex workers and during an only-men social event. This practice produces certain changes in young men's social status, because intercourse seems to be the gateway to their male adult identity as certified by their peers. This ritual seemed to provide young men with a socially sanctioned performance that helped them through the passage from one social status to the other. What seemed to be inaugurated here is the participant's capability of reproduction and adult manhood.

...most of these rites -whose sexual nature is not to be denied and which are said to make an individual a man or a woman, or fit to be one- fall into the same category as certain rites of cutting the umbilical cord, of childhood and of adolescence. These are rites of separation from the asexual world, and they are followed by rites of incorporation into the world of sexuality and, in all societies and all social groups, into a group of persons confined to persons of one sex or the other (Van Gennep 1960:67).

Another major ritual found in participants' accounts -that of marriage- pertains to a different phase of social and individual life. In this research, marriage between partners that already had sex seemed to be a passage from one social status to another, because the unmarried sexual couple was considered illegitimate and polluted until institutionalized within the community. Sex had to be regulated through marriage, so that the order broken by disobedience could quickly be restored.

The passage from the profane to the sacred here discussed through these rituals could not be derived directly from participants' accounts. It looks like the meaning of this passage has been secularized throughout history, so that rituals remain a meaningful practice, albeit not always directly related to religion. This view is discussed by Douglas (1966), who says that 'very little of our ritual behaviour is enacted in the context of religion' (Douglas 1966:69). This author claims that Durkheim's (1965) absolute separation of the sacred from the profane is problematic, because he 'advocated an

altogether too unitary view of the social community' (Douglas (1966:22)). She agrees, however, on the definite importance of ritual for social life, in terms that symbolic acts are what constitute social relations. What she argues against Durkheim is that not all ritual is related to religion, and she questions the hierarchical distinction between 'primitive' and modern cultures, in terms of an evolutionary conception in which primitive magic would be qualitatively different from modern science.

Douglas' (1966) theory of the ritual appeared useful to me because she considers that ritual's potential to be a gateway between the worlds of the sacred and the profane is only one of its functions. For her, rituals can also serve as a vehicle to impose a certain order unto an otherwise set of disconnected situations that are not always related to religious beliefs.

In order to support this application of the category of ritual to other areas than that of the sacred, Douglas (1966) argues against the formal distinction between primitive and modern societies based upon religion and secularization because, for her, modern civilizations are also filled with rituals although they do not always involve religion. Rather, the main characteristic of rituals is that they have a constitutive effect upon experience by organizing it within certain social frameworks:

Not only does ritual aid us in selecting experience for concentrated attention. It is also creative at the level of performance... It can come first in formulating experience. It can permit knowledge of what would otherwise not be known at all. It does not merely externalize experience, bringing it out into the light of day, but it modifies experience in so expressing it (Douglas 1966:65).

Thus, what Douglas argues is the importance of ritual precisely as I consider it relevant for this research, that is, in that it provides a socially sanctioned way to constitute experience and ascribe meaning to individual actions, feelings and thoughts.

In the case of this study, the ritual of initiation with a sex worker offered male participants an organized way to have their first intercourse. It also provided strong meanings regarding their inclusion in the social category of manhood via the acquisition of a certain sexual knowledge that men are expected to have when married.

There is yet another aspect that supports the categorization of this experience as a ritual. Douglas (1960) ideas on Van Gennep's work (1960), show that the transitions between one social space and another is considered dangerous and in need of social control:

Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others. The danger is controlled by ritual, which precisely separates him from his old status, segregates him for a time and then publicly declares his entry to his new status (Douglas 1966:97).

What seems to underlie in the accounts shown above, is that the passage from boyhood to manhood is plagued by danger. A man who stays a virgin after accomplishing physiological maturity can be trapped in the transition, in a middle ground; there is a danger of not becoming a man as defined by dominant gender meanings, that is, a heterosexual man. The danger that this ritual seems to exorcise is not only homosexual desire and practice, but also feminine traits that would supposedly emerge as a result of the absence of heterosexual activity. Homophobia and sexism are thus at the foundations of this ritual of male identity.

A single woman that has had intercourse becomes dangerous as well, in the sense that she is now seen as an open body to men, and her sexual activity cannot be controlled unless governed by somebody. Thus, the ritual of marriage as an obligation to the man that deflowered a virgin exorcises such a danger by giving the husband the responsibility to control his wife's sexuality.

Thus, it is possible that the religious rationale

for these rituals is no longer as present as it could have been one or two generations before, so that the only function they still carry out is that of organizing and constituting experience through symbolic action. Still, the history of the relationship of such rituals with certain religious beliefs is still important, because it helps to understand the outstanding value that participants attached to female virginity.

Thus, these rituals followed certain religious beliefs that could have been lost as a result of the process of secularization, but certainly the metaphors and meanings regarding virginity offered by participants of this study are closely related to the cult and myth of the Virgin Mary, which in Mexico had a particular strength through the figure of **Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe** (Our Lady of Guadalupe¹¹). This image blended Spanish Catholic beliefs with certain images of indigenous female deities, and was imposed -quite skillfully by mixing it with prehispanic emblems and beliefs- as the ideal form of woman, setting the standards for many of the characteristics that have been considered feminine throughout the Western world, and which Mexican culture inherited in many particular ways.

Whatever the degree of enforcement that the prescription of female virginity could have, its effects on the construction of meaning and identities among the participants was strong, because there is a social dimension to these rules. As Warner (1991) has shown, there has been a continuous interaction between dominant discourses of Catholic theology and social conditions, which has produced, throughout centuries in Western society, images of women and their sexuality that have become moral codes and prescriptions for the actual behaviour of women, just like participants' accounts express.

Apart from human traits like her goodness, kindness,

¹¹ See chapter I: **The hybrid construction of sexuality in Mexico.**

self-sacrifice and denial, Mary's main characteristic was her virginity, untouched by Jesus' divine conception. Not only did Mary's virginity ensured the supernatural nature of the birth of Jesus as well as God's might, but it also preserved Jesus' holiness since he had not been conceived through the Original Sin. Thus, Mary's purity reinforced the myth of the fall of Adam and Eve because of their surrender to the temptations of the flesh, just like this myth constructed women as creatures of nature, sin and pain (Warner 1991). Warner explains such particular devotion for female virginity as an inheritance from previous historic eras:

There was a particular attitude toward virginity which Christian religion must have inherited from the classical world: that virginity was powerfully magic and granted strength and ritual purity (Warner 1991:80*).

Although the sacred dimension of female virginity seems to have a history long before Christianity, it was this particular religion that emphasized the opposition between flesh and spirit as representatives of evil and good, defining sexual practice as sinful, rather than as useless or superfluous as it was thought of in pagan traditions. Catholicism also opposed virginity as sacred and pure, to sexual activity as profane and impure. Consequently, many different strategies for the social control of women's sexual activity could be drawn from such definitions, as it has been shown here by participants' stories.

What this chapter has tried to show is that there are strong echoes of religious meanings of virginity and sexual initiation in participants' experience, when they define sexual activity as a moral matter by which they have to police themselves and others. It is interesting, however, that the religious origins of such ideas have been lost for these individuals, and that the moral dimension of sexuality that they strongly express seems to be the result of the process of secularization that Mexico is undergoing, and the inheritance of long

centuries of Catholic dominance upon individuals' lives. Whether accepted, submitted or resisted, the notion of the sexual as a sin of the flesh inheres in the concept of sexual activity as bad.

**AMBIGUITY AND RESISTANCE:
THE SURVIVAL OF SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGES OF SEXUALITY
IN THE FACE OF MODERNITY**

CONCLUSION

This thesis has discussed the ways in which individuals construct and experience sexuality amidst the complexity of Mexican contemporary sexual culture, in light of its uneven process of secularization and modernization. Its emphasis was not upon the demarcation of dominant social discourses of sexuality in Mexico, but upon the constructions of personal experience from the standpoint of individuals in the face of such discourses, as I focused especially upon the meanings participants ascribed to their first sexual intercourse and to virginity.

Using a social constructionist approach to sexuality, in chapter I¹ I described the main historical trends that have constructed sexuality in Mexico, as well as the dominant social discourses that presently compete to define it. It is within this hybrid social discursivity that the participants, who came from different social and cultural contexts, dialogically constructed their identities and ascribed meaning to their experience of their bodies, pleasures and desires, during their conversations with me.

This study analyzed how individuals' experience of first sexual intercourse is linked to social and local discourses in terms of submission or resistance, through the presence of alternative or subjugated knowledges in their accounts. That is, I looked at the ways in which participants dealt with social discourses, community voices, inner dialogues, and their subjective experience of the body, in order to construct the meaning of their

¹ The hybrid construction of sexuality in Mexico.

first sexual intercourse.

In order to do this, I discussed the concept of subjectivity as constituted by power, discourse and dialogue, which in turn is expressed through language. As I said in chapter II², as much as subjects are constituted by dominant discourses, they also have the possibility to move within that discursive sphere, taking a position before them, which depends on the discourses' capacity to express their experience.

1. About the method.

There are several considerations that need to be discussed about the method that I designed to answer such research questions. First of all, there remains the question of why I did not follow any previously proved sociological, anthropological or psychological procedure. As I discussed in chapter III³, I did start from a theoretical background that orientated my approach to the problem and to the field. These referents were mainly constructionist works around sexuality and gender, that could inform the process in which I was interested the most: the construction of a social subjectivity, that is, the relationship between the individual and the cultural, from the point of view of the experience of sexuality.

During the initial literature search, what I found were mainly theoretical works that expressed the concepts that I was interested in, but they did not offer any empirical methods of research, and even less regarding sexuality, so that I decided to operationalize such concepts in order to look at my object of study (subjectivity and experience of sexuality as constructed through language and in relation to dominant and alternative discourses). But, at the same time, I was

² Subjectivity, sexuality and experience.

³ The negotiation of meaning through dialogue: the method.

interested in approaching the field as open-minded as I could be, so that categories and codes could emerge from field data, although always aware of my own situatedness, including my theoretical background⁴. This could only be done through a creative process of interplay between theory and fieldwork that allowed for the gradual construction of interpretive categories.

To follow previously proved methods could only provide information about their relevance for Mexican culture, but they would also constrain my own process of thinking and interpreting, which I intended to do inductively. Since I was not interested in proving the usefulness of a particular method in Mexican society, I intended to construct a complex research problem and the appropriate methodological tools that could address it within such context.

This thesis has tried to contribute to one of the main debates regarding qualitative methodology, which has been the interpretation of data. Although it is always suggested that interpretation should be done inductively, researchers often agree that such procedures cannot be designed beforehand, and that the only way to learn to interpret is to actually do it⁵. Thus, the process of interpretation itself is rarely described, but usually considered a black box where creativity should be exercised, and which could only be known by its results.

In this research, I deconstructed precisely such process of interpretation, by conducting a reflexive analysis of my own thinking while coding data. Although probably too personal and difficult to replicate, the method allows the reader to explore the path that I followed when faced with field materials, so that conclusive interpretations could be discussed and

⁴ See chapter III, 1. **The situated dialogue: politics of research.**

⁵ I was struck when I first read Potter and Wetherell's (1987) recognition that discourse analysis could not be described nor taught except through practice itself.

analyzed in light of the notions that I used. The procedure I followed was to make explicit the steps I took when interpreting the material, so that it was only a matter of logic and of reflexivity. This is why I had to consider that the issues discussed in chapters IV and V⁶ were among many other possibilities of interpretation. However, I identified for the reader the constructive elements that I used during the process, so that interpretations were not asserted as the product of some objective procedure by which, if followed, would produce the same information. If other researchers came to different conclusions, I would ask them to do the same process of deconstruction, so that I could understand the grounds for their interpretations. It is nevertheless possible that other academics could come to the same conclusions that I came to because I grounded them as much as I could upon field data. However, this could only happen if such researchers shared my theoretical background. Thus, my main preoccupation was not only to identify participants' constructions of meaning, but the evidence that I used in order to assert that there were such constructions.

Another strength of the method is that it was designed **ad hoc** for the research problem, so that the main theoretical questions could be addressed. I think that it presents researchers with an interesting option to conceptualize social subjectivity, whether the substantive issue is sexuality or not. But its specificity is also this method's weakness, since it would require a profound revision if it were to be used for other set of questions.

The main methodological lesson that I learned from this process is the importance of looking at the data while at the same time deconstructing and analyzing the

⁶ See chapter IV. **The gendered construction of subjects of sexuality and the role of sexual knowledge**, and chapter V. **The moral dimension of sexuality: evil, the sacred and rituals of sexual initiation.**

researcher's gaze.

Finally, the importance of resorting to one's own experience during fieldwork and interpretation can never be overstressed. It is precisely the researcher's capability to understand participants' stories -both intellectually and emotionally- what allows any production of knowledge. To listen to the other means a two-sided exercise: one has to both make the obvious strange and to feel the others' issues as if they were one's own, so that in this process of dialogue the researcher can use her/his own experience as an analogy to comprehend the others'. But as much as the researcher interprets and questions participants' accounts, so must she/he be open to the questioning they pose to her/him, whether or not this is discussed during fieldwork.

2. About identities.

Regarding the constructions of meaning revealed by the research, certain issues about identities came up as fundamental categories, like the degree to which different participants expressed some self-agency, which seems to be related to their exposure to modern discourses and to urban life and culture. The more urban experience they had, the more they talked about themselves as autonomous individuals. Still, as shown by their accounts, they never separated totally from their groups' expectations and moral values⁷. This finding is related to the ways in which modern discourses of individualism and freedom have been interpreted within Mexican culture, which seemed to follow a different path from that of Western societies, in that the ideas of the Enlightenment did not penetrate as strongly. The quest for individualism that was so successful in European protestant countries has faced two major resistances in

⁷ See chapter IV: 1. **The construction of an autonomous subject.**

Mexico: one was the prehispanic concept of the person as part of nature, the supernatural world and her/his social group, and the other one was the Spanish strong culture of group solidarity and unity, preserved by the social aspects of the Counter-Reformation.

Both these traditions mixed through **mestizaje** during the Colonial period, so that when the cultural trends associated with capitalism came into the country during the present century, the result could be nothing else than a hybrid construction of the individual, both compelled to fuse with her/his groups' culture, and to aspire to the charms of modernity's individualism and consumerism. This cultural hybridity was shown by the accounts in chapter IV, in which many of the participants did not construct themselves as such free individuals, but their identity was very much fused with the social group they belonged to. It remains as a research question to precise the factors that allow or hinder these different degrees of self-agency among different social and cultural groups in Mexico.

It also seems that, among these participants, subjectivity was not equivalent to the construction of an independent subject in the face of the State, as is the case of Western societies, but that subjectivity is very much linked to the social group, so that family, community and ethnic identity come to absorb the direct intervention of the State in the individual's life experience. However, this does not mean that they are not subjects, but that subjectivity is constituted with their group's. Thus, subjectivity in this research is not defined by modernity's autonomy and individualism, but by the profound bond of the individual to his/her social group in which he/she has a particular place that defines his/her identity. This seems to be a major resistance process against the globalization of modernity in Mexico, given by its particular historic conditions.

2.2. Sexuality defines identity?

A second major conclusion from this work pertains to the concept of subjectivity and its relevance for this research's material. As seen in chapter II, subjectivity was born along with the concept of sexuality, because in modern societies it is the latter that has come to define a person's identity. But the relevance of this concept for Mexican cultures needs to be discussed in light of this research's findings. It seems to me that sexuality does not define male and female identities alike, but only masculinity. What both identities seem to share is their direct relationship with the cultural construction of the sexed body, and to male and female gender stereotypes. Female participants do not rely on their sexual practice in order to define their identity. Rather, they do so by complying to dominant moral images of femininity, especially through motherhood, as shown in chapter V. Women are not constructed, in these stories, as subjects of sexual desire in their own right, because it has to be always related to other considerations, mainly to love, reproduction or conjugal obligation. This way, desire is moralized by either constraining it to marriage or redeeming it through love and motherhood⁸.

The introduction of modern discourses of universal entitlement to sexual desire and practice seems to be pushing individuals to confront these Catholic definitions of femininity, in that they legitimize desire for itself and disregard what is considered the danger of a single woman's 'loose' sexuality. However, this contestation was expressed by participants by quoting modern discourses of power, because several examples showed that, when speaking about their practice and experience, participants contradicted this alleged

⁸ See excerpts Bertina: 1, III.5.1, Amanda: 4, V.2.1, and Jesús: 1, IV.2

acceptance of women's sexual freedom⁹. Thus, although the split of the image of woman into virgin or whore was discursively questioned by urban and well educated rural participants, as prescribed by modern discourses, it seems that, at the level of experience, feeling and practice, such equality has not been assimilated. Still, this Catholic split that permeates sexual experience is not obeyed by male participants, because many of them married repentant non-virgin women. What seems to be held is the bad image and reputation of a single woman that does not get married immediately after intercourse and who has more than one partner before her union.

History could aid us in understanding these constructions of identity. Catholicism has offered Mexican women a compelling image of power and respect through the Virgin Mary, the mother of God. By contrast to protestant countries, where there is no female religious image that could vindicate the domestic sphere, Mary turns the household and the family into a sacred space where the mother is the central figure, so that the female identity that is constructed upon this image is not as powerless as it can be in protestant cultures.

In Mexican Catholic culture, power relationships within the home are the most important asset and emblem of women's identity. By contrast with what would happen with women in protestant countries, this study's female participants do not feel that they have to work in order to have access to some power, because they do so through motherhood.

Also, often in Mexico men are absent from families, especially among working and middle-class groups, because of intense peer group activities, migration and sometimes because they have another relationship, or even another family, that they look after. So, Mexican women from certain social strata have always worked in order to

⁹ See excerpts Jesús: 1, IV.2 y José: 1, IV.3.2

support their children, regardless of the presence of the father. In this context, women's work does not always mean a liberation from the oppressive confinement of the private sphere, but only further exploitation and responsibility. Still, culturally there is a need to have a man in order not to be considered dangerous or failed.

Men, by contrast, seem to identify themselves mainly through their power over women and through peer relationships where identity is constantly confirmed. They do not seem to rely on work or reason for the construction of their male identities, as could be said for Western societies¹⁰. It is only among urban young men that reason seems to be cherished as a male asset¹¹. Instead, many participants talked about the importance of controlling women's freedom of movement and their possible sexual activity in order to assert their masculinity. This is particularly acute regarding female virginity, where they consider themselves both the guardians and beneficiaries of such a precious asset.

However, sexuality does have to do with male identity among the men in this study, not in terms of heterosexuality, but of 'active' and penetrative sexuality. What seems to be male is not so much the choice of the object of sexual practice, but the kind of sexual practice itself. It is the passivity and receptivity attributed to female sexuality that could trouble a man's identity. But as long as he penetrates, his masculinity can be preserved. Thus, these men's identities are not equivalent to what Western modern culture calls 'heterosexuals', as opposed to 'homosexuals'.

These findings provide a depiction of Mexican sexual

¹⁰ In chapter III Saúl described men as **wild cattle**, meaning men's gregarious behaviour and compelling experience of sex as animal. Both metaphors are quite opposed to the notion of reason and independence so appreciated in Western culture.

¹¹ See excerpts Jesús: 1, IV.2 and Víctor; 1, III, 5.2.

culture as quite different to that of the West. I have explained in chapter II¹² that modern sexual identity movements have not reached Mexican rural and poor urban population, but only middle class, well-educated individuals who have access to information about Western gay and lesbian groups. For the rest of the population, these new sexual identities remain foreign, because here sexual practices do not seem to define the totality of the person. A man can be called queer or faggot ~~maricon~~ if he shows what are considered feminine traits, like fear, passivity, tenderness or vulnerability, if he helps around the household, if he refuses to have sex as prescribed by his peer group or if he lets himself be penetrated by another man. But these practices do not amount to the transformation of the whole individual's identity, because it is group membership what defines him the most. We need to do a deeper theoretical and historical reflection upon these cultural differences because subjectivity and religion seem to be closely linked, especially around sexuality, and also because social movements like feminism and sexual identities groups derive from such constellations of meaning.

3. About ambiguity and resistance: dominant and subjugated discourses of sexuality.

This finding leads to the discussion of what I consider the major conclusion of this research, which has to do with the relationship between the dominant moral discourses of sexuality, and those alternative, subjugated and practical knowledges that participants expressed. Both in chapter IV and V, I have shown many testimonies in which participants uphold Catholic moral values regarding female virginity while at the same time speak of practices that do not respect such

¹² II. 2. Sex, identity and gender.

prescriptions, sometimes making considerations about their guilt or sense of fault, but sometimes simply avoiding the consequences of breaking these injunctions. The persistence of this apparent contradiction forced me to try to explain it through my understanding of Mexican culture's history, and from my own experience as a born and raised Catholic woman.

What I can draw from the material here discussed is the existence of a complex and dynamic process in which dominant moral codes and subjugated knowledges relate to each other in ways that are not mere obedience or transgression. As I have discussed in chapters IV and V, although moral injunctions regarding female virginity and male first sexual intercourse are clearly present in participants' accounts, they also tell about innumerable actions and constructions of resistance and disobedience, in such a way that I had to ask myself what is the function of this moral code if it is bound not to be obeyed¹³.

In most of participants' stories and accounts there is a clear presence of two kinds of discourses: one is the discourse of power, represented mainly by Catholic morality and less frequently by science and health constructions, and the other one is the subjugated discourse of practice and personal experience. Participants move within this discursive domain with a relative freedom because, while accounts rely predominantly upon Catholic moral values in order to describe sexuality, modern discourses are used discretionally in order to justify or express certain needs¹⁴.

In participants' accounts, dominant Catholic

¹³ Let me recall that seven out of eleven women in this study had intercourse before marriage, and only three of them with their future husbands.

¹⁴ This would be the case of family planning discourses, which have been used in order to back up and justify the reduction of family size that has been so notorious in Mexico in the last 20 years.

discourses of virginity are felt as imperative and authoritative voices, whether quoted directly or indirectly. Their presence can be seen as a massive quotation of injunctions and precepts that invade and populate participants' stories. By contrast, subjugated discourses of experience are uttered in fragmented and less organized ways, sometimes very much tainted by emotional expressions and descriptions of actions and events. Dominant discourses are always presented in the form of statements and sentences, while subjugated knowledges are often included as stories, narratives and metaphors. These differences may suggest that participants refuse to appropriate themselves of dominant discourses and that they often respond to them with their own resistant discourses of practice.

The dynamics of this relationship between dominant and alternative discourses does not only occurs at the societal and cultural level of national culture, but at the level of personal experience and action as well. Experience for these participants is hybrid, in the sense that, from its origins, it is marked by these discursive trends.

However, the relationship between these discourses is not that of opposition and frontal struggle, but of ambiguity and tolerance. That is, these discourses coexist without really clashing or eliminating each other. If that were the case, the transgressions to the prescription of female virginity here told by participants would have been punished, for example, with boyfriends' rejection. Rather, what seems to happen is that moral discourses do not really meet discourses of practice, so that what is said at one level is not really opposed by the other. Single young girls speak of the importance of their virginity while not keeping it; male participants strongly assert the groom's right to refuse a non-virgin bride, while most of them accepted their girlfriends without hesitation. Both dimensions seem to

live together with some degree of mutual tolerance and avoidance of conflict. The only bridges that I could find between them were guilt feelings both by single non-virgin girls and by boys that had sex with virgins (and who finally married them), and boyfriends' forgiveness to girlfriends that had experience before them¹⁵.

While dominant Catholic discourses classify and stigmatize sexual practices, at the level of subjugated discourses the injunctions are ambiguously and often successfully avoided and manipulated. In fact, resistance practices do not seem to be real transgressions, in the sense that morality and practice appear to belong to two different dimensions of cultural life, so that they coexist in a pacific manner, so to speak.

Although participants did not link moral values to religion, dominant meanings of virginity are closely related to Catholic doctrines. This detachment from the religious origin of morality may express the secularization that Mexican sexual culture has been undergoing during this century, in which this proscription was once spoken by institutional characters but later inherited to local authority figures -called 'the custom'.by participants-.

But there is still another injunction, this time for men, that does not seem to come from Catholicism but precisely from the subjugated discourses of practice. Such an injunction is that men should have sexual intercourse early in their lives. This is, in fact, a direct confrontation to the notion of sexuality as evil so expressed during conversations. While the preservation of virginity is an 'official' and dominant injunction, early sex for boys is a 'non-official' and local prescription¹⁶, spoken among peers and town folks¹⁷.

¹⁵ See excerpts Gabriela: 2, IV.2, Amanda: 3, IV.3.1, Mercedes: 1, V.1.

¹⁶ See excerpts Alberto: 1, IV.2, Eduardo: 1, III.6 and Armando:1, V,2.1.

¹⁷ Men are supposed to want early sexual initiation so that, although many

It is gender that seems to allow for such a difference, because sex for men is evil only if they do it with a virgin, while it is all nonmarital sexual activity that the prohibition expects from women. Two things can build a connection between these two apparently contradictory injunctions because they repair the damage or redeem the fault of sexual intercourse: one is love¹⁸ and the other one is marriage. In this case, men's sexual activity seems to be regulated through a sense of honor and guilt very much linked to masculinity, in terms that they feel forced to marry the woman they have deflowered in order to repair the damage¹⁹. If not, they would be regarded as cowards and unlawful to their own word.

This double discursive system may show that participants' relationship to their own discourse is quite different to the will of truth that is so central for Western culture. It seems that, in Mexican culture, one's own word is floating, always depending upon the context in order to be taken as truthful. Thus, the degree of commitment to one's own word is quite ambiguous and strategic, because that way one ensures a certain freedom of movement and the survival of subjugated knowledges that, if confronted directly with those that are dominant, would be eliminated²⁰.

What are the reasons for this complex cultural configuration? In terms of participants' experience, it seems that moral rigidity is accompanied by subtle

of them do not wish to do it, they feel compelled to in order to confirm their identity in the face of their peers. Although participants stated that this is the most common form of initiation, many of them simply refused to undergo such ritual. For those that complied to it often the result was a performance in which they pretend to enjoy it.

¹⁸ See excerpts Carlos and Fernando: 1, IV.2.2, Amanda: 2, IV.2.2.

¹⁹ See excerpts Eduardo: 3, V.3.2 and Jorge, Part Two, 2.

²⁰ This idea reminds vaguely about the procedures of the Inquisition, in which oral or written confession was enough to forgive the accused, whose practices were not really surveyed thereafter.

tolerance because, if transgression and disobedience were not overlooked, massive conflict between generations and social groups would come about. To make explicit that there are opposed moral values between Catholic and subjugated discourses of the practice would inevitably lead to conflict and struggle. Ambiguity allows for everyone to uphold their values without having to confront and eliminate the other's, but without being forced to acknowledge them either.

The possible explanations for these particular cultural and subjective dynamics are complex and sometimes obscure, but, in general terms, they could lie in the historical relationship of dominance and subjugation represented by Spanish and Indian populations during the Conquest and the Colonial period. A clear example of this ambiguity and tolerance is the fact that Indian religions and gods were preserved by disguising them within Catholic rituals, through syncretism and hybridity. Disguise was a survival strategy for the Indian peoples, just as much as ambiguity for the Spanish, because thanks to them overlooking these practices, the conquerors avoided to carry on further confrontation and death. As long as discursively the Indians accepted their conversion to the 'true' religion, the Spanish would often turn the other way when faced with indigenous' disguised religious and sexual practices.

But also, the Spanish themselves performed a double standard regarding moral Catholic injunctions, so that they could not claim to be a role model for the Indians. For example, they would rape Indian women, or have a Spanish wife in Europe and several concubines in America, while still confessing to abide to Catholic morals.

Although these historical considerations cannot be taken as direct interpretations of the discursive ambiguity described above, they certainly provide a framework for understanding what seem to be deeply rooted

cultural trends, which have constructed and constituted sexual meanings in Mexico, and that can be felt within the experience of this research's participants.

Modern discourses of individualism, sexual freedom and choice are now being introduced at the same level of authority, and even opposing those of Catholic morality, as shown by several participants' accounts that use science in order to contest religious injunctions. For instance, the relationship between discursive resources and construction of an autonomous identity that I discussed in chapter IV.1 poses a series of dilemmas. On the one hand, the identity based on the group seems to rely strongly on the subjugated discourse of practice, which allows for wide ambiguity and avoidance of conflict with Catholic morality. On the other hand, individual identity fostered by modern discourses of gender equality, family planning and human rights, stands opposite to Catholicism, and produces a struggle that forces one of them to be eliminated from the subject's discourse. If assimilated into experience, modern discourses force to an undesired confrontation with traditional morality within the 'subjective conscience'. This is particularly well illustrated by Patricia (1, IV.2.2), who legitimizes the 'naturalness' of sexual arousal, but immediately denies any experience of it. If she carried such an entitlement to the ultimate conclusion, she would have to fight a battle within her subjectivity against Catholic morality, which seems to be embodied with greater strength. But, on the other hand, to acknowledge verbally her sexual feelings would allow for new forms of its control and surveillance, so that by keeping it unacknowledged she somehow preserves its existence. I think that the most common solution to this dilemma has been, for this research's participants, to repeat and quote modern discourses while still embodying Catholic and subjugated knowledges and leaving them as separate realms that do not need to confront each other.

This example, along with others²¹, may show that the proscription against naming sexual desire may function as a protection for the subjugated discourse of practice, and that the consequences of modernity would force sex to come into speech and therefore to deprive it of its possibility to be expressed outside the new techniques of power exercised by medicine and health and population discourses.

What will be the effect of such clash in terms of the experience of sexuality? Until now, ambiguity and double discursivity have been efficient survival strategies of subjugated knowledges, so that if the will of truth that is embedded in modern conceptions is really enforced, what other resistance strategies will be deployed? It is quite unlikely that Mexican culture and subjectivities will ever resemble Western individualism and rationality, but the outcomes of this hybrid process remain to be seen, documented and understood.

4. About new research questions

All these considerations suggest the need for further research along two different lines and methods: on the one hand, we need to trace the specificity of the history of sexuality in Mexico and, on the other, we have to explore sexual cultures of different classes and social groups. It can be derived from my work that sexuality in Mexico cannot be studied separately from family organization and gender stereotypes, because they are very much related to each other in a culture where the Catholic sense of family and of group bonding are extremely strong and resistant to global definitions of individualism and sexuality. This suggests that Mexico's modernity will never be similar to that of Western countries, because the cultural and subjective traditions

²¹ See excerpt José: 1, IV.3.2.

that conformed it throughout history are not inevitably bound to disappear, but to function as resistance to globalization. We need to develop our own theories and categories to describe and analyze this phenomenon as a different reality than that of the West, and not as phases of an evolutionary, inexorable process.

I consider this research to be an exploration of the complexities of Mexican sexual culture from the standpoint of individuals from different backgrounds, within the historical and social conditions that make this country what it is now: a hybrid and complex nation that is populated by a myriad of discourses and cultures. I arrived to these conclusions by trying to understand the hybridity of this research's conversations and it remains to be investigated whether or not such discursive ambiguity does in fact operate in Mexican current culture, and to what degree is it present among different social groups. The completion of this study has brought about the birth of new research questions like the ones above, which are relevant to Mexican specific cultural characteristics. Because of the inductive procedure that I followed, the research objects that I have discussed above can be seen as drawn from the experience of participants.

In this thesis I have tried to tell a story about a process of research that has offered me the opportunity to discover many others that shared their stories with me and, through them, to discover many sides of my own self. I have decided to pause in the telling of this story, not to end it, with a thought that encompasses my own feeling of growth through this voyage:

The Other is what allows me not to repeat myself forever (Baudrillard 1994:174).

In this relationship I learn and enjoy the gift of voices, stories and experience.

REFERENCES

- Aggleton, Peter (1996) "(Is there) method in the madness? Methodology and interpretation in socio-sexual research on HIV and AIDS", Paper presented at the Conference **Reconceiving sexuality: international perspectives on gender, sexuality and sexual health**, Rio de Janeiro, April.
- Alberro, Solange (1979) "Sexualidad y sociedad", in Alberro, Solange and Gruzinski, Serge eds, **Introducción a la historia de las mentalidades. Seminario de historia de las mentalidades y religión en el México colonial**, Cuadernos de Trabajo del Depto. de Investigaciones Históricas, INAH, N° 24, México.
- (1982) "La sexualidad manipulada en Nueva España: Modalidades de recuperación y de adaptación frente a los tribunales eclesiásticos", in **Familia y sexualidad en Nueva España. Memoria del Primer Simposio de Historia de las mentalidades: Familia, matrimonio y sexualidad en Nueva España**, FCE, México.
- and Gruzinski, Serge (1979) **Introducción a la historia de las mentalidades. Seminario de historia de las mentalidades y religión en el México colonial**, Cuadernos de Trabajo del Depto. de Investigaciones Históricas, INAH, N° 24, México.
- Alcoff, Linda (1989) "Feminismo cultural vs. posestructuralismo: la crisis de la identidad en la teoría feminista", **Feminaria**, N° 4, Noviembre.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C (1992) **Las teorías sociológicas desde la segunda guerra mundial**, Gedisa, Madrid.
- Amorós, Celia (1994) **Feminismo: igualdad y diferencia**, UNAM/PUEG, México.
- Amuchástegui, Ana (1994) **El significado de la virginidad y de la iniciación sexual para jóvenes mexicanos**, The Population Council/UAM-Xochimilco, México, manuscript.

- Aramoni, Aniceto (1965) **Psicología de la dinámica de un pueblo (México, tierra de hombres)**, B. Costa-Amic editores, 2a. ed., México.
- (1984) **El mexicano, ¿un ser aparte?**, Ed. Offset, México.
- Ariès, Philippe; Béjin, André; Foucault, Michel, et al (1987) **Sexualidades Occidentales**, Paidós, México.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M (1981) **The dialogic imagination. Four essays by M.M. Bakhtin**, in Holquist, Michael ed, Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson trans, University of Texas Press, Austin TX.
- **Problems of Dostoievsky's poetics** (1963/1984), Caryl Emerson trans, The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minn.
- **Speech genres and other late essays** (1986), in Emerson, Caryl and Holquist, Michael eds, Vern W. McGee trans, University of Texas Press, Austin TX.
- Bartra, Roger (1987) **La jaula de la melancolía. Identidad y metamorfosis del mexicano**, Grijalbo, México.
- Bataille, Georges (1992) **El erotismo**, Antoni Vicens trans, Tusquets, 6a. ed., Barcelona.
- Baudrillard, Jean (1994) **The transparency of evil. Essays on extreme phenomena**, James Benedict trans, Verso, London.
- Bauleo, Armando (1974) **Ideología, grupo y familia**, Folios, México.
- et al (1979a) **Grupo operativo y psicología social**, Imago, Montevideo.
- (1979b) **Psicología y sociología de grupo**, Fundamentos, 2a. ed., Madrid.
- Baz, Margarita (1996) **Metáforas del cuerpo: un estudio sobre la mujer y la danza**, UNAM/PUEG, México.
- Behar, Ruth (1995), "Rage and redemption: reading the life story of a Mexican marketing woman", in Tedlock, Dennis and Mannheim, Bruce eds, **The dialogic emergence of culture**, The University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago.

- Béjar Navarro, Raúl (1979) **El mexicano. Aspectos culturales y psicosociales**, UNAM, México.
- Berger, Peter and Luckman, Thomas (1968) **La construcción social de la realidad**, Amorrortu, Bs. As.
- Bernard, Carmen and Gruzinski, Serge (1988) "Los hijos del Apocalipsis: la familia en Mesoamérica y en los Andes", in Burguière, André, Klapisch-Zuber, Christiane, Segalen, Martine and Zonabend, Françoise eds, **Historia de la familia. Tomo 2. El impacto de la modernidad**, Alianza Editorial, Madrid.
- Billig, Michael (1987) **Arguing and thinking**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blancarte, Roberto (1993) "Modernización, secularización y religión: la Iglesia católica, el Estado y la sociedad mexicana en el umbral del siglo XXI", in Blanco, José Joaquín and Woldenberg, José comps, **México a fines de siglo, II**, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México.
- Block, Gisela and James, Susan (1992) **Beyond equality and difference: citizenship, feminist politics and female subjectivity**, Routledge, UK.
- Bonfil Batalla, Guillermo (1990) **México Profundo**, Grijalbo/CNCA, Col. Los Noventa, N° 1, México.
- Bronfman, Mario; Amuchástegui, Ana; Martina, Rosa María; Minello, Nelson; Rivas, Martha and Rodríguez, Gabriela (1995) **SIDA en México: migración, adolescencia y género**, Información Profesional Especializada, México.
- and Minello, Néstor (1995) "Hábitos sexuales de los migrantes temporales mexicanos a los Estados Unidos. Prácticas de riesgo para la infección por VIH", in Bronfman, Mario ed, **SIDA en México. Migración, adolescencia y género**, Información Profesional Especializada, México.
- Bruner, Edward (1986a), "Experience and its expressions", in Turner, Victor and Bruner, Edward eds, **The anthropology of experience**, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago.
- (1986b) "Ethnography as narrative", in Turner,

Victor and Bruner, Edward eds, **The anthropology of experience**, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago.

- Bruner, José Joaquín (1992) **América Latina en la encrucijada de la modernidad**, Documento de trabajo, FLACSO, Serie: Educación y Cultura, Chile.

- Butler, Judith (1992) "Sexual inversions", in Stanton, Donna ed, **Sexual discourses. From Aristotle to AIDS**, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbour.

---- (1996), "Variaciones sobre sexo y género: Beauvoir, Wittig y Foucault", in Lamas, Marta comp, **El Género: la construcción cultural de la diferencia sexual**, Porrúa/PUEG, México.

- Caillois, Roger (1942) **El hombre y lo sagrado**, FCE, México.

- Camarena Córdova, Rosa María (1996) "Educación, medios de comunicación y salud reproductiva", Paper presented at the **Seminario Nacional sobre Avances en Salud Reproductiva y Sexualidad**, El Colegio de México, México.

- Caplan, Pat (1987a) "Introduction", in Caplan, Pat ed, **The cultural construction of sexuality**, Routledge, London-NY.

---- (1987b) **The cultural construction of sexuality**, Routledge, London-NY.

- Carrier, Joseph (1995) "De los otros. Intimacy and homosexuality among Mexican men" in Faderman, Lillian and Gross, Larry eds, **Between men - between women. Lesbian and Gay studies**, Columbia University Press, NY.

- Castro, Roberto (1996) "Supuestos, alcances y limitaciones del análisis cualitativo", in Szasz, Ivonne and Lerner, Susana comps and Amuchástegui, Ana col (1996) **Para comprender la subjetividad. Investigación cualitativa en salud reproductiva y sexualidad**, El Colegio de México, México.

- Collier, Jane F. and Rosaldo, Michelle Z. (1981), "Politics and gender in simple societies", in Ortner, Sherry and Whitehead, Harriet eds, **Sexual meanings. The**

- cultural construction of gender and sexuality**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano (1972) "Mensaje del Episcopado al pueblo de México sobre paternidad responsable", **Señal**, 12 de diciembre, México.
 - Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO) (1988) **Encuesta nacional sobre sexualidad y familia en jóvenes de educación media superior**, México.
 - (1996) **Indicadores básicos de salud reproductiva y planificación familiar**, México.
 - Corrêa, Sonia and Reichmann, R (1994) **Population and Reproductive Rights: Feminist Perspectives from the South**, ZED Books, London.
 - Corona Vargas, Esther (1994) "Una ética para la nueva sexualidad" in **Lecturas básicas sobre educación en la sexualidad**, CONAPO/SEP/MEXFAM, México.
 - De Barbieri, Teresita (1992) "Sobre la Categoría Género. Una Introducción Teórico-Methodológica", in **Revista Interamericana de Sociología**, N° 2, mayo-agosto.
 - De Beauvoir, Simone (1981), **El segundo sexo. La experiencia vivida**, Tomo 2, Pablo Palant trans, Ediciones Siglo Veinte, Argentina.
 - Denzin, Norman and Lincoln, Yvonne eds (1994) **Handbook of qualitative research**, Sage, Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi.
 - Díaz, Rafael (forthcoming) "Latino gay men and the psycho-cultural barriers to AIDS prevention", in Levine M, Gagnon J and Nardi P eds, **A plague of our own: the impact of the AIDS epidemic on gay men and lesbians**, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
 - Dirección General de Epidemiología (1989) **Encuesta sobre sexualidad y SIDA en estudiantes universitarios**, Secretaría de Salud, Mexico.
 - Douglas, Mary (1966) **Purity and danger. An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo**, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
 - Durkheim, Emile (1965) **The elementary forms of**

- religious life**, Joseph Swain trans, The Free Press, NY.
- Elu de Leñero, María del Carmen, et al (1970) **Mujeres que hablan**, IMES Editorial, México.
 - **Excélsior** (1990), "Encuestas del Centro de Estudios de Opinión Pública", 6 de mayo de 1990, p. 1-A, México.
 - **fem** (1977) Vol 11, N° 5, octubre-diciembre.
 - Flandrin, Jean-Louis (1987) "La vida sexual matrimonial en la sociedad antigua: De la doctrina de la iglesia a la realidad de los comportamientos", in Ariès, Philippe; Béjin, André; Foucault, Michel, et al, **Sexualidades occidentales**, Paidós, México.
 - Flax, Jane (1990) "Posmodernismo y relaciones de género en la teoría feminista", **Feminaria**, N° 5, Abril.
 - Foucault, Michel (1979) **Microfísica del poder**, La Piqueta, 2a. ed, Madrid.
 - (1980) **Power/knowledge. Selected writings and other writings**, Pantheon Books, NY.
 - (1981) **Historia de la sexualidad, I, La voluntad de saber**, Siglo XXI, 7a. ed., Mexico.
 - (1984a) "No al sexo rey. Entrevista por Bernard Henry-Levy", in Morey, Miguel ed, **Un diálogo sobre el poder y otras conversaciones**, Alianza Editorial, Madrid.
 - (1984b) "Opción sexual y actos sexuales: Una entrevista con Michel Foucault. Una entrevista realizada por James O'Higgins", in Morey, Miguel ed, **Un diálogo sobre el poder y otras conversaciones**, Alianza Editorial, Madrid.
 - (1985) **Vigilar y Castigar, El nacimiento de la prisión**, Siglo XXI, 11a. ed, México.
 - (1988a) "El sujeto y el poder", in Rabinow, Paul and Dreyfus, Hubert eds, **Michel Foucault. Más allá del estructuralismo y la hermenéutica**, UNAM, México.
 - (1988b) **Historia de la sexualidad II. El uso de los placeres** Siglo XXI, 3a ed, México.
 - (1991) **Tecnologías del yo y otros textos afines**, Paidós, 2a. ed., Barcelona.
 - Freeman, Derek (1984) **Margaret Mead and Samoa. The**

making and unmaking of an anthropological myth, Penguin Books, UK.

- Freud, Sigmund (1915/1973) "Los instintos y sus destinos", in **Obras Completas**, Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid.

---- (1929/1973) "El malestar en la cultura", in **Obras Completas**, Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid.

- Friedman, Herbert (1992) "Changing patterns of adolescent sexual behavior: consequences for health and development", **Journal of Adolescent Health**, 13, 5, July 1992.

- Fromm, Erich and Maccoby, Michael (1973) **Sociopsicoanálisis del campesino mexicano. Estudio de la economía y la psicología de una cultura rural**, FCE, México.

- Fuentes, Carlos (1990) **Valiente Nuevo Mundo**, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México.

- García Canclini, Néstor (1988) "Culture and power: the state of research", **Media, Culture and Society**, Vol.10.

---- (1990) **Culturas híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad**, Grijalbo/CNCA, Col. Los Noventa, N° 50, México.

- García Guzmán, Brígida (1994) "Fuerza de trabajo. Ocupación y condiciones de trabajo", **Demos**, N° 7, México.

- García, Julio and Figueroa, Juan Guillermo (1992) "Práctica anticonceptiva en adolescentes y jóvenes del area metropolitana de la ciudad de México", in **Salud pública de México**, 34, 4, Julio-Agosto 1992.

- Geertz, Clifford (1973) **The intepretation of cultures**, Basic Books, New York.

---- (1983) **Local Knowledges. Further essays in interpretive anthropology**, Basic Books, NY.

- George, Annie (1996) "Gender relations in urban households in Bombay. Challenges for HIV/STD prevention", Paper presented at the Conference **Reconceiving sexuality: international perspectives on gender, sexuality and sexual health**, Rio de Janeiro, April.

- Gergen, Kenneth J (1985) "The social constructionist

movement in modern psychology", **American Psychologist**, 40, 266-275.

- Giddens, Anthony (1991), **Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age**, Polity Press, UK.

- Giménez, Gilberto (1992) "La identidad o el retorno del sujeto en sociología", **Versión** N° 2, UAM-Xochimilco, Abril.

- Ginsburg, Faye and Rapp, Rayna (1991) "The politics of reproduction", **Annual Review of Anthroponology**, Vol 20.

- Goffman, Erving (1961) **Asylums. Essays on the social situations of mental patients and other inmates**, Doubleday, NY.

- Gonzalbo Aizpuru, Pilar coord. (1991) **Familias novohispanas. Siglos XVI al XIX**, Seminario de Historia de la Familia, Centro de Estudios Históricos, El Colegio de México, México.

- González Block, Miguel Angel and Liguori, Ana Luisa (1993), "El SIDA en los de abajo", in **Nexos**, No. 185, May 1993.

- González Marmolejo, Jorge René (1987) "Confesores y mujeres en el obispado de Puebla. Siglo XVIII", in **Seminario de historia de las mentalidades. El placer de pecar y el afán de normar**, Joaquín Mortiz/INAH, México.

- González Montes, Soledad (1995) "Las 'costumbres' de matrimonio en el México Indígena Contemporáneo", Paper presented at the **IV Reunión Nacional de la Sociedad Mexicana de Demografía**, México, photocopy.

- González Pineda, Francisco (1961) **El mexicano. Su dinámica psicosocial**, Ed. Pax-México, 2a. ed, México.

- González Ruiz, Edgar (1996) "Conservadurismo y sexualidad en México", paper presented at the **Seminario Nacional sobre Políticas Sociales, Sexualidad y Salud Reproductiva**, El Colegio de México, México.

- Gramsci, Antonio (1975) **El materialismo histórico y la filosofía de Benedetto Croce**, Obras de Antonio Gramsci, 3, Juan Pablos Editor, México.

- Gruzinski, Serge (1979) "Historia de la sexualidad", **Cahiers des Ameriques Latines**, Serie: Sciences de l'homme: 20.
- (1982) "La 'conquista de los cuerpos' (Cristianismo, alianza y sexualidad en el alitplano mexicano: siglo XVI)", in **Familia y sexualidad en Nueva España. Memoria del Primer Simposio de Historia de las mentalidades: Familia, matrimonio y sexualidad en Nueva España**, FCE, México.
- (1987) "Confesión, alianza y sexualidad entre los indios de Nueva España", in **Seminario de historia de las mentalidades. El placer de pecar y el afán de normar**, Joaquín Mortiz/INAH, México.
- "Individualization and acculturation: confession among the Nahuas of Mexico from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century", in Lavrín, Asunción ed (1989) **Sexuality and marriage in colonial Latin America**, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London.
- Hall, Stuart (1992), "The question of cultural identity", in Hall, Stuart, Held, David, and McGrew, Anthony eds, **Modernity and its futures**, Understanding Modern Societies Series, The Open University, UK.
- Haste, Helen (1993) **The sexual metaphor**, Harvester Wheatsheaf, NY-London.
- Held, David (1992) "Liberalism, marxism and democracy", in Hall, Stuart, Held, David, and McGrew, Anthony eds, **Modernity and its futures**, Understanding Modern Societies Series, The Open University, UK.
- Hernández, Juan Carlos (1996) "Bisexuality in Veracruz state: the case of Tecolutla", Paper presented at the Conference **Reconceiving sexuality: international perspectives on gender, sexuality and sexual health**, Rio de Janeiro, April, 1996.
- Honigmann, John (1982) "Sampling in ethnographic work", in Burgess, Robert ed, **Field Research. A Sourcebook and Field Manual**, Unwyn Hyman, London.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e

- Informática (INEGI) (1992) **Undécimo censo general de población y vivienda 1990**, México.
- (1995a) **Encuesta Nacional de Empleo**, México.
- (1995b) **Coyoacán. Distrito Federal. Cuaderno Estadístico Delegacional**, Edición 1995, México.
- (1996a) **Conteo 95. Resultados definitivos. Tabulados básicos**, México.
- (1996b) **Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica. Oaxaca. Panorama Sociodemográfico**, México.
- (1996c) **Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica. Guanajuato. Panorama Sociodemográfico**, México.
- (1996d) **Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica. Distrito Federal. Panorama Sociodemográfico**, México.
- Izazola, José Antonio, Valdespino, José Luis and Sepúlveda, Jaime (1988) "Factores de riesgo asociados a infección por VIH en hombres homosexuales y bisexuales", **Salud Pública**, Vol 30, N° 4.
- , Valdespino, José Luis; Juárez, Luis Guillermo; Mondragón, Manuel; Sepúlveda, Jaime (1989) "Conocimientos, actitudes y prácticas relacionadas con el SIDA. Bases para el diseño de programas educativos", in Sepúlveda Amor, Jaime ed, **SIDA. Ciencia y sociedad en México**, Secretaría de Salud/Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública/Fondo de Cultura Económica, México.
- Janesick, Valerie J (1994) "The dance of qualitative research design. Metaphor, methodolatry and meaning" in Denzin, Norman and Lincoln, Yvonna eds, **Handbook of qualitative research**, Sage, Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi.
- Katz, Jonathan (1995), **The invention of heterosexuality**, Dutton, USA.
- Lagarde, Marcela (1990) **Cautiverios de las mujeres: madresposas, monjas, putas, presas y locas**, UNAM, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Centro de Estudios sobre la Universidad, México.

- Lamas, Marta (1996a) "Movimiento feminista y discurso político: los derechos sexuales y reproductivos en la construcción de una ciudadanía moderna", Paper presented at the **Seminario Nacional sobre Políticas Sociales, Sexualidad y Salud Reproductiva**, El Colegio de México, México.
- (1996b) "Usos, dificultades y posibilidades de la categoría 'género'", in Lamas, Marta comp, **El Género: la construcción cultural de la diferencia sexual**, Porrúa/PUEG, México.
- Laqueur, Thomas (1990) **Making sex. Body and gender from the greeks to Freud**, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Lara, María Pía (1992) "Reconocernos en la modernidad", **Debate Feminista**, Año 3, Vol. 5, Marzo.
- Lavrín, Asunción ed. (1989a) **Sexuality and marriage in colonial Latin America**, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London.
- (1989b) "Sexuality in colonial Mexico", in Lavrín, Asunción ed, (1989) **Sexuality and marriage in colonial Latin America**, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London.
- Legros, Monique (1982) "Acerca de un diálogo que no lo fue", in **Familia y sexualidad en Nueva España. Memoria del Primer Simposio de Historia de las mentalidades: Familia, matrimonio y sexualidad en Nueva España**, FCE, México.
- Leñero Otero, Luis (1990) **Jóvenes de hoy**, Pax-MEXFAM, México.
- Liendro, Eduardo (1995) "Juventud y masculinidad. Construcción de identidades de género en un barrio popular de la ciudad de México", Paper presented at the **V Coloquio Anual de Estudios de Género**, UNAM, México.
- Liguori, Ana Luisa (1995) "Las investigaciones sobre bisexualidad en México", **Debate Feminista**, Año 6, Vol. 11, April.
- and Szasz, Ivonne (1996) "La investigación sobre

- sexualidad en México", **Perinatología y Reproducción Humana**, Vol 10, N° 2, Abril-Junio.
- López Austin, Alfredo (1989) **Cuerpo humano e ideología. Las concepciones de los antiguas nahuas**, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas/UNAM, México.
- (1996) "La sexualización del cosmos", Paper presented in the First Congress of FEMESS, April 1996, Mexico.
- Lumslen, Ian (1991) **Homosexualidad, sociedad y estado en México**, Sol Ediciones/Canadian Gay Archives, México.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw (1929/1941) **The sexual life of savages**, Halcyon House, New York.
- Manero Brito, Roberto (1990) "Los psicólogos y la implicación", in Casanova Cardiel, Patricia comp, **Las profesiones en México. Psicología**, N° 6, UAM-Xochimilco, México.
- Mannheim, Bruce and Tedlock, Dennis (1995) "Introduction", in Tedlock, Dennis and Mannheim, Bruce, eds., **The dialogic emergence of culture**, The University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago.
- Marcos, Sylvia (1989) "Curas, diosas y erotismo: El catolicismo frente a los indios", in Portugal, Ana Ma. ed., **Mujeres e Iglesia. Sexualidad y aborto en América Latina**, Fontamara, México.
- Mc Grew, Anthony (1992) "A global society?", in Hall, Stuart, Held, David, and McGrew, Anthony eds, **Modernity and its futures**, Understanding Modern Societies Series, The Open University, UK.
- Mc Nay, Lois (1992) **Foucault and feminism**, Polity Press, UK.
- Mead, Margaret (1923) **Coming of age is Samoa**, Morrow, New York.
- Medina, María Elena (1996) "Iniciará Arzobispado campaña de sexualidad", **Reforma**, 11 de diciembre.
- Mejía, María del Consuelo (1996) "Normas y valores de la Iglesia Católica en la sexualidad y la reproducción: nuevas perspectivas", Paper presented at **Seminario**

Nacional sobre Avances en Salud Reproductiva y Sexualidad, El Colegio de México, México.

- Mier, Raymundo (1995) **Seminario de Investigación Cualitativa**, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco, unpublished manuscript, October.

- Mishler, Elliot (1986) **Research interviewing. Context and narrative**, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MASS/London.

- Monsiváis, Carlos (1995) "Ortodoxia y heterodoxia en las alcobas", **Debate Feminista**, Año 6, Vol 11, Abril.

- Moore, Susan and Rosenthal, Doreen (1992), "The social context of adolescent sexuality: safe sex implications", **Journal of Adolescence**, 15, 4, December 1992.

- Morey, Miguel (1991) "Introducción. La cuestión del método", en Foucault, Michel **Tecnologías del yo y otros textos afines**, Paidós, 2a.ed., Barcelona.

- Morris, Pam (1994a) "Introduction", in Morris, Pam ed, **The Bakhtin reader. Selected writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov**, Edward Arnold, UK.

- Morris, Pam ed (1994b) **The Bakhtin reader. Selected writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov**, Edward Arnold, UK.

- Morse, Richard (1982) **El espejo de Próspero**, Siglo XXI, México.

- Nathanson, Constance ed (1991) **Dangerous passage. The social control of sexuality in women's adolescence**, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA.

- Nebel, Richard (1995) **Santa María Tonantzín. Virgen de Guadalupe. Continuidad y transformación religiosa en México**, FCE, México.

- Oakley, Ann (1981) "Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms", in Roberts, H ed, **Doing Feminist Research**, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

- Organización Panamericana de la Salud. Organización Mundial de la Salud (OPS/OMS) (1988) **Fecundidad en la Adolescencia. Causas, riesgos y opciones**. Cuaderno Técnico N° 12. Washington DC.

- Ortiz, Humberto (1997) "Insatisfactorios aún, los índices de ocupación: Jarque", **La Jornada**, 15 de marzo.
- Ortner, Sherry and Whitehead, Harriet (1981a) "Introduction: Accounting for sexual meanings", in Ortner, Sherry and Whitehead, Harriet eds, **Sexual meanings. The cultural construction of gender and sexuality**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge MA.
- (1981b) **Sexual meanings. The cultural construction of gender and sexuality**, Cambridge University Press, UK.
- Paiva, Vera (1996) "Fostering the sexual subject: gender and class in the sexual scene", Paper presented at the Conference **Reconceiving sexuality: international perspectives on gender, sexuality and sexual health**, Rio de Janeiro, April.
- Pamplona, Francisco, Monterrubio Ma. Isabel and Mejía, Miguel A (1993), "Marginación y desarrollo social en México", **Demos**, N° 6, México.
- Palomera Romo, Ana Francisca (1993) **Investigación realizada en la colonia Ajusco. Delegación Coyoacán**, UNAM, Escuela de Trabajo Social, photocopy.
- Parker, Richard (1991) **Bodies, pleasures and passions. Sexual culture in contemporary Brazil**, Beacon Press, Boston.
- Paris Pombo, María Dolores (1990) **Crisis e identidades colectivas en América Latina**, Plaza y Valdés-Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, México.
- Paz, Octavio (1979) **El Ogro Filantrópico**, Joaquín Mortiz, México.
- Pérez Cortés, Sergio (1991) "El individuo, su cuerpo y la comunidad", **Alteridades**, Año 1, N° 2, 1991.
- Petchesky, Rosalind (1996) "Sexual rights: inventing a concept, mapping an international practice", Paper presented at the Conference **Reconceiving sexuality: international perspectives on gender, sexuality and sexual health**, Rio de Janeiro, April.
- Pichón-Rivière, Enrique (1981) **El proceso grupal. Del psicoanálisis a la psicología social**, I, Nueva Visión,

6a. ed, Buenos Aires.

- Poder Ejecutivo Federal (1996a) **Programa Nacional de Población 1995-2000**, México.

---- (1996b) **Programa de Salud Reproductiva y Planificación Familiar 1995-2000**, México.

--- (1996c) **Programa Nacional de la Mujer 1995-2000**, México.

- Pontifical Council for the Family (1996) "The truth and meaning of human sexuality. Guidelines for the education within the family", in **origins**, CNS Documentary Service, Vol. 25, N° 32, February 1st.

- Portugal, Ana Ma. ed. (1989) **Mujeres e iglesia: sexualidad y aborto en América Latina**, Fontamara, México.

- Potter, Jonathan and Wetherell, Margaret (1987) **Discourse and social psychology. Beyond attitudes and behavior**, Sage, London/Newbury Park/Beverly Hills/New Delhi.

- Prieur, Annick (1994) "Power and pleasure: male homosexuality and the construction of masculinity in Mexico", Paper presented at the **48th International Congress of Americanists**, Uppsala, July, 1994.

- Quezada, Noemí (1989) **Amor y magia amorosa entre los aztecas**, UNAM, 3a. ed., México.

- Rábago, Aurora, et al (1993), "Salud Reproductiva en Adolescentes", in Alarcón, Francisco ed, **Prioridades en Salud Reproductiva**, Secretaría General de la Conferencia Interamericana de Seguridad Social, México.

- Ramírez, Santiago (1983) **El mexicano, psicología de sus motivaciones**, Grijalbo, 7a. ed, México.

- Rapp, Rayna (1979) "Anthropology", **Signs**, Vol. 4, N° 3, Spring 1979.

- Roberts, H ed (1981) **Doing feminist research**, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

- Rocha, Martha Eva (1990) **Las mujeres en la Revolución Mexicana, un acercamiento a las fuentes históricas**, Federación de Mujeres Universitarias, UNAM, México.

---- (1991) **El álbum de la mujer. Antología ilustrada de**

las mexicanas. Vol. IV. El porfiriato y la Revolución, INAH, México.

---- (1994) "Historia de los comportamientos amorosos y su transformación. El noviazgo. 1935-1968", Paper presented at the meeting: Sexualidad y Ciencias Sociales, El Colegio de México, photocopy.

- Rodríguez, Gabriela (1994) "Conceptos y métodos en la educación de la sexualidad", in **Antología de la sexualidad humana. III**, CONAPO, México.

---- Amuchástegui, Ana; Rivas, Marta and Bronfman, Mario (1995) "Mitos y dilemas de los jóvenes en tiempos del SIDA", in Bronfman, Mario ed, **SIDA en México: migración, adolescencia y género**, Información Profesional Especializada, México.

---- (1996) "Educación sexual y problemas de población", in Aguilar Gil, José Angel and Mayén Hernández, Beatriz comp. **Hablemos de sexualidad: Lecturas**, CONAPO/MEXFAM, México.

---- Corona, Ester and Pick, Susan (1996) "Educación para la sexualidad y la salud reproductiva", in Langer, Ana and Tolbert, Kathryn eds, **Mujer: sexualidad y salud reproductiva en México**, The Population Council/EDAMEX, México.

- Rosaldo, Renato (1991) **Cultura y Verdad. Nueva Propuesta de Análisis Social**. CNCA/Grijalbo. Col. Los Noventa. N° 77. México.

- Ross, Ellen and Rapp, Rayna (1984) "Sex and society: a research note from social history and anthropology", in Snitow, Ann; Stansell, Christine; and Thompson, Sharon eds, **Desire. The politics of sexuality**, Virago Press, London.

- Rowe, William and Schelling, Vivian (1991) **Memory and modernity. Popular culture in Latin America**, Verso, London/New York.

- Rubin, Gayle (1975) "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex", in Reiter, Rayna ed, **Toward an Anthropology of Women**, Monthly Review Press, New York-

London.

---- (1989) "Reflexionando sobre el sexo: notas para una teoría radical de la sexualidad", in Vance, Carole ed, **Placer y peligro. Explorando la sexualidad femenina**, Talasa, 2a. ed., Madrid.

- Ruz, Mario Humberto (1996) "El cuerpo: miradas etnológicas", in Szasz, Ivonne and Lerner, Susana comps, and Amuchástegui, Ana col, **Para comprender la subjetividad. Investigación cualitativa en salud reproductiva y sexualidad**, El Colegio de México, México.

- Sahagún, Bernardino de (1956) **Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España**, Porrúa, México.

- Salles, Vania and Tuirán, Rodolfo (1996) "El discurso de la salud reproductiva: ¿un nuevo dogma?", paper presented at the **Seminario Internacional sobre Avances en Salud Reproductiva y Sexualidad**, El Colegio de México, México.

- Sampson, Edward (1993) **Celebrating the Other. A Dialogic Account of Human Nature**, Harvester Wheatsheaf, NY-London.

- Sarup, Madan (1989) **An introductory guide to post-structuralism and post-modernism**, The University of Georgia Press, USA.

- Secretaría de Salud, Dirección General de Planificación Familiar (1988) **Informe de la Encuesta sobre el Comportamiento Reproductivo de los Adolescentes y Jóvenes del Area Metropolitana de la Ciudad de México**, México.

- Seidler, Victor (1987) "Reason, desire and male sexuality", in Caplan, Pat ed, **The Cultural Construction of Sexuality**, Routledge, London/New York.

- Shepherd, Gill (1987) "Rank, gender and homosexuality: Mombasa as a key to understanding sexual options", in Caplan, Pat ed, **The cultural construction of sexuality**, Routledge, London/NY.

- Stake, Robert (1994) "Case studies" in Denzin, Norman and Lincoln, Yvonna eds, **Handbook of qualitative research**, Sage, Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi.

- Stanton, Donna (1992) "Introduction: the subject of sexuality", in Stanton, Donna ed, **Discourses of sexuality. From Aristotle to AIDS**, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbour.
- Stein, Edward ed, **Forms of desire. Sexual orientation and the social constructionist controversy**, Routledge, UK, 1992.
- Stephen, Lynn (1991) **Zapotec Women**, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX.
- Suárez, Marcela (1994) "De amores y castigos", in **Sociológica**, año 9, 26, september-december.
- Szasz, Ivonne (1996) "Separating sexual intercourse from reproduction: a study on a rural context of Mexico", Paper presented at the Conference **Reconceiving sexuality: international perspectives on gender, sexuality and sexual health**, Rio de Janeiro, April, 1996.
- , Lerner, Susana comps and Amuchástegui, Ana col (1996) **Para comprender la subjetividad. Investigación cualitativa en salud reproductiva y sexualidad**, El Colegio de México, México.
- Tedlock, Dennis and Mannheim, Bruce eds (1995) **The dialogic emergence of culture**, The University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago.
- Tiefer, Leonore (1987) "Social Constructionism and the Study of Human Sexuality", in **Sex and Gender**, Sage Newbury Park, CA.
- Tuirán, Rodolfo (1996) "Comunicación en población y procesos de difusión", **Demos**, N° 9.
- Tuñón, Julia (1990) "La construcción del género: mujer, ¿tu nombre es amor?", **Debate Feminista**, Año 1, Vol. 1, Marzo.
- (1991) **El album de la mujer. Antología ilustrada de las mexicanas. Vol. III. El siglo XIX (1821-1880)**, INAH, México.
- Turner, Bryan (1989) **El cuerpo y la sociedad. Exploraciones en teoría social**, FCE, México.
- Turner, Victor (1967) **The forest of symbols: Aspects of**

- Ndembu ritual**, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- and Bruner, Edward, eds (1986) **The anthropology of experience**, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago.
- Van Gennep, Arnold (1960) **The rites of passage**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Vance, Carole (1989) "El placer y el peligro: hacia una política de la sexualidad", en Vance, Carole, ed., **Placer y peligro. Explorando la sexualidad femenina**, Talasa, 2a. ed., Madrid.
- (1991) "Anthropology rediscovers sexuality. A theoretical comment", in **Social science and medicine**, Vol. 33, N° 8.
- Vázquez, Antonio A (1997) "Se deterioró 71.4% el poder adquisitivo de 1976 a la fecha", **La Jornada**, 15 de marzo.
- Viqueira, Juan Pedro (1984), "Matrimonio y sexualidad en los confesionarios en lenguas indígenas", in **Cuicuilco**, N° 12, Año IV, January, 1984.
- Voloshinov, Valentin N (1929/1973) **Marxism and the philosophy of language**, Matejka L and Titunik IR trans, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MASS.
- (1927/1976) **Freudianism. A critical sketch**, Titunik IR trans, edited in collaboration with Bruss, Neal, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana.
- Warner, Marina (1991) **Tú sola entre las mujeres. El mito y el culto de la Virgen María**, Taurus, Madrid.
- Weeks, Jeffrey (1986) **Sexuality**, Routledge, London/New York.
- (1991) **Against nature. Essays on history, sexuality and identity**, Rivers Oram Press, UK.
- (1992a) "The body and sexuality", in Bobock, Robert and Thompson, Kenneth eds, **Social and cultural forms of modernity**, Polity Press/The Open University, UK.
- (1992b) "Values in an age of uncertainty", in Stanton, Donna ed, **Discourses of sexuality. From Aristotle to AIDS**, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

- (1993) **El malestar de la sexualidad. Significados, mitos y sexualidades modernas**, Talasa, Madrid.
- (1995) "The making of gender and sexual identities", Paper presented at the meeting **Los nuevos paradigmas de la sexualidad**, El Colegio de México/AMES, México.
- Welti, Carlos (1991) "Políticas de población y descenso de la fecundidad", Paper presented at the **Conferencia Centroamericana del Caribe y México sobre políticas de población**, PROLAP/INDAP/IISUNAM, La Antigua, Guatemala, Abril.
- Wertsch, James V (1991) **Voices of the mind. A sociocultural approach to mediated action**, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London.
- White, Michael and Epston, David (1990) **Narrative means to therapeutic ends**, Norton, New York/London.

APPENDIX A
DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

COMMUNITY	NAME/AGE	OCUPATION	EDUCATION	MIGRATION	COUPLE/ CHILDREN	VIRGINITY STATUS
DISTRITO FEDERAL	Patricia/15	Student	Secondary	---	Single	Virgin
	Soledad/24	Housewife	Secretary	---	Married/1	Non-virgin
	Mercedes/22	Family business	Secondary	---	Married/ pregnant with first child	Non-virgin
	Victor/15	Student	Secondary	---	Single	Non-virgin
	Aurelio/15	Student	Secondary	---	Single	Virgin
	Jesús/21	Student	Professional	---	Single	Non-virgin
GUANAJUATO	Alicia/31	Housewife	Elementary/ incomplete	Near cities	Married/3	Non-virgin
	Bertina/30	Trade	Teacher	Near cities	Single	Non-virgin
	Amanda/23	Housewife/ clerk	Secretary	Near cities/ Mexico City	Married/1	Non-virgin
	Armando/23	Construction	Elementary	Near cities/ USA	Married/2	Non-virgin
	Saúl/28	Construction	Elementary/ incomplete	Near cities/ Mexico City	Married	Non-virgin
	Guillermo/25	Clerk	Elementary/ incomplete	Near cities/ USA	Separated/2 remarried/1	Non-virgin
	Alberto/18	Blacksmith	Elementary/ incomplete	Near cities/ USA	Single	Non-virgin
OAXACA	Gabriela/24	Housewife/ weaver	Technician	Near city	Union/not- married	Non-virgin
	Carmen/19	Weaver	Elementary	Near city	Single	Virgin
	Marta/25	Weaver	Secretary	Near city/ Mexico City	Single	Non-virgin
	Lourdes/16	Student/ weaver	High school	Near city/ Mexico City	Single	Virgin
	Claudia/30	Housewife/ weaver	Teacher	Near city/ provinces	Married/2	Non-virgin
	José/21	Student/ construction	High school	Near city/ USA	Single	Non-virgin
	Jorge/30	Weaver/owner	High school/ incomplete	Near city	Married/2	Non-virgin
	Eduardo/25	Weaver/ employee	Technician	Near city/ USA	Married/2	Non-virgin
	Fernando/18	Student/ weaver	Technician	Near city	Single	Virgin
	Carlos/18	Butcher	Secondary	Near city	Single	Virgin

TOTAL OF CONVERSATIONS CARRIED OUT: 27
TOTAL OF CONVERSATIONS ANALYZED: 23

APPENDIX B

CONVERSATION GUIDELINE

1. FRAMING THE CONVERSATION AND INTRODUCING MYSELF
2. INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANT
 - Working, educative, recreational and domestic activities
 - Age, educational level
 - Couple situation: none, married, living together, etc.
 - Number of children
3. FAMILY OF ORIGIN AND GENDER PREMISSES
 - Gender education (domestic tasks, studies, hierarchies, obedience, surveillance, etc)
 - Gender premisses regarding the couple and marriage, family and reproduction
4. SEXUAL EDUCATION AND INFORMATION
 - Most frequents concerns and problems in their community
 - Did you get any information or counselling about the physiological processes of your body? From whom?
 - The effects of this information in his/her experience as a sexual subject and in his/her practices
 - Would you have liked more or better information? From whom?
 - Who can you talk to about sexuality? About what subjects?
 - Do you know, and how did you, about puberal changes in girls? and boys?
 - Do you know, and how did you, about conception, intercourse, pregnancy and delivery?
5. IF HE/SHE HAS A PARTNER, THE STORY OF HIS/HER COUPLE
 - Practices, customs and meanings associated with courtship
 - Expressions about that experience and about couple formation
 - Role of gender in courtship/what's allowed and forbidden for each gender
 - Traditions that were followed and those that were not. What would he/she rather had done? Which ones does she/he agrees or does not agree with?
 - Role of the family, the church, the community, the law, in the legitimation of the relationship
 - Role of marriage: civil or religious. Descriptions.
 - Social status of married and unmarried couples.

6. IF HE/SHE DOES NOT HAVE A PARTNER

- Community religious practices, rituals and feasts
- Descriptions about couple formation in the community
- Do they need permission? By whom?
- Role of the family, the church, the law, the community in order to legitimate the relationships
- Sexual rituals, beliefs and practices. Which does she/he agree or not with? Which would he/she rather change?
- Is there a ritual that expresses the event of first intercourse, or the proof of virginity of the couple, or just the girl's?
- Or a ritual that shows that boys become men? That girls become women?

7. FIRST INTERCOURSE

- Find out if he/she has had sexual intercourse
- Decision-making process (if there is such): expectations, possibility of planning, experience (feelings, thoughts, etc)
- Type of relationship with sexual partner. Possibility of sexual negotiation
- Role of gender. Beliefs and meanings for each.
- Place, situation, partner.
- Incest or rape.
- Personal and social consequences: couple, family, community, health, pregnancy, etc.
- Practices that can be told and those that must be silenced
- Signs of non-virginity among girls and/or boys. Couple's, family's and community reactions.
- Dominant discourses and norms around sexuality, especially around the first intercourse: where, with whom, and in which circumstance it should be carried out. Gender differences.
- Meanings associated to female virginity. Consequences of its loss.
- Meanings associated to male virginity. Consequences of its loss.

8. CONTRACEPTION

- Use, beliefs and practices
- Whose responsibility it is to prevent pregnancy and disease? Negotiation process.
- Local knowledge and practices, means of transmission
- Meanings of medical/modern practices.
- Accessibility. Supply.
- For health consultation, who do they turn to?
- Social status of women or couples that prevent pregnancy
- Image of health providers.

APPENDIX C

EXCERPTS IN SPANISH

Chapter III: The negotiation of meaning through dialogue: the method.

Saúl: 1

SAUL: Por eso, en este caso, digo yo, si yo tengo dos meses, ahorita, o dos meses y medio, si recién mi relación y mi señora me sale con que no, 'no siento qué síntoma de embarazada' y digo, oye, 'pues si yo estoy trabajando bien duro, siento que me estoy acabando y no, estoy vacío, por decirlo así, que estás tirando lo que ya no..., no consigo muy fácil'. ¿Está bien eso o no es eso de dar vida por vida? Dar vida para dar vida...

INVESTIGADORA: No. ¿Sabe por qué? Porque mire, cuando a veces las parejas... es muy... primero, es muy pronto para que usted esté preocupado porque no se embaraza su mujer, es demasiado pronto, es demasiado pronto, o sea, hay que entender que para embarazarse, solamente hay una oportunidad al mes, una al mes, nada más, ¿me entiende? No es de a diario.

S: ¿No es diario?

I: No, es una oportunidad cada mes, entonces, dése usted cuenta que solamente ha tenido dos oportunidades...

S: ¿En dos meses?

I: En dos meses, entonces, no es tanto...

S: ¿Y sin embargo si... y sin embargo, si yo, en esos dos meses ya llevo como diez eyaculaciones, por decir, o más de diez...?

I: Pero, si no son en los días...

S: ¿Y si a mí se me está acabando la vida por dar vida?

I: No se le está acabando, eso no se le acaba.

Bertina: 1

BERTINA: Pues es que... es que mis tíos vinieron y se quedan aquí semanas, y no me acuerdo dónde fueron mis tíos... creo ni estaban ahí y él nada más se quedó, y yo... yo me confié, me tocó en mi cuarto y le abrí, luego empezó a platicar sobre... sobre el amor y todo eso, y dice, '¿qué te parece aquí el rancho?' 'No', le digo... dice, '¿cuántas veces has tenido relaciones?', le digo, 'no, yo ninguna', '¡ah!', dice, 'pues ahorita vamos a ver'... y luego, la siguiente noche, me sentí pero mal, o sea, me pegó donde... ¡híjole!, ya luego le dije a mi mamá, no sé qué me pasó y yo... yo no le quería decir, me daba como temor, no sé qué y ya le empecé a decir... dice, '¡ay!', dice... 'no sé qué, de cuántas', bueno no dijo así feo, porque mi mamá no es mala y mi papá sí dice

'negro', porque está bien negro el muchacho y dice, 'no', dice, 'si sales mal', dice, 'te tiene que cumplir', dice, dice, 'o... o... o vamos allá, allá a la Presidencia', dice. 'Si, si fue así voluntario o fue a...'

I: ¿A fuerzas?

B: A fuerzas.

I: ¿Y cómo fue?

B: Pues voluntario.

I: ¿Si?

B: Es que no me podía aguantar...

Saúl: 2

SAUL: cuando empecé a vivir en Celaya, que vivía ahí, que vivía casi yo solo, ¿verdad?, vivía con mis parientes, luego un tiempo viví con mi hermana, rentaba ahí, me empezó un poquillo de libertad y todo eso, ya me empezaron a jalar, entonces ahí si me empecé a juntar con... con el ganado bravo...

INVESTIGADORA: ¡Ah!, ¿el ganado bravo? ¿Se empezó a juntar con la raza?

S: Me empecé a juntar con la raza y fue ahí donde yo comencé a..., pues a..., a meterme en lo que era eso, del sexo.

I: ¡Ah!, ¿le explicaban sus amigos? ¿Qué hablaban de eso?

S: Si. No, o nos llevaban por ahí a pasear y íbamos a los bailes, luego..., primero nos íbamos al cine, al cine y ahí veíamos películas de esas, de porno...

I: ¿Y ahí fue donde usted empezó a entender cómo?

S: A entender más o menos, lo hice muy tarde, como a los veinte, veintiuno.

I: ¿Antes de eso nada? ¿No..., no sabía bien qué? ¿No?

S: Antes nada, nada, no.

I: ¿No?

S: No.

I: ¿Y... y, este... allá en Celaya, entonces se empezó a juntar con el ganado bravo?

S: Ey...

I: ¿Y qué le decía el ganado bravo, ya que se tenía que poner abusado? ¿No?

S: No. Si, el ganado bravo me decía. No traíamos a planta, traíamos una onda entre sí, entre los camaradas, que decíamos, vamos a llevar a... éste a que haga su primera comunión...

I: ¡Ah!, ¿si?

S: Si, y ya nos lo cargábamos, bueno, pues casi eso uno pasaba, casi eso pasaba uno, uno pasaba por ahí, más o menos.

I: Ajá.

S: Y al que iba a hacer la primera comunión, se le concedía una muchacha, 'órale...'

I: Andele...

S: Entonces, ya se veía uno comprometido...

I: Andele... ¿O sea que no había manera de decir, 'pérenme tantito que yo no quiero', que... no?

S: No, no, era una... así, como un hilito que traíamos...

Gabriela: 1

GABRIELA: Al saberlo él [su padre] me dijo que... 'yo nunca, yo no te mando [a la escuela] a tener novio, yo te mando a aprender, que a tener asuntos con los niños, pero tú te sabes comportar'. 'Lo único que te digo, yo no estoy haciendo nada malo, ¿no?, platicando, pues, es lo más normal, ¿no?, platicarles, así conozco un poco más de la vida', fue todo lo que me dijo... dice, 'pues ahí tú ya sabrás qué es lo que haces', pero si ya después se calmó y me dijo: 'no pues yo no puedo decirte qué hacer, lo único que te pido es que te des a respetar y que nunca nos defraudes'.

INVESTIGADORA: Ajá y ¿qué sería defraudarlos?

G: Pues yo creo sería... pues... tener relaciones y que, pues, por la inexperiencia tal vez, ¿no?, por falta de información y conocimientos, pues a veces se da el caso de que algunas chavas, niñas, tal vez, salen embarazadas.

Eso yo creo que tal vez es defraudar la confianza que tus padres te han ofrecido.

Carmen: 1

CARMEN: También mi mamá me dice así...

I: ¿Sí? ¿Cómo te dice?

C: Me dice que... que 'no vayas a coquetear a los hombres cuando salgas a la calle, cuando tengas...'

I: ¿Y por qué no quiere?

C: Pues no sé...

I: ¿Qué le preocupa?

C: Que porque los hombres cuando les hacen así las muchachas, ellos dicen '¡uy!, es una cualquiera' y eso no quiere mi mamá que digan de mí.

I: ¿Que digan de tí? ¿Y cuáles son las cualesquiera?

C: Pues las que andan coqueteándoles, eso dicen los hombres, pues.

I: ¡Ah! ¿Y cuáles son las cualesquiera? ¿Cómo son las cualesquiera? O sea, ¿las has visto?

C: No.

I: ¿No?

C: No, yo no sé quiénes son...

I: ¿No? ¿No sabes quiénes son? ¿Son las que les coquetean?

C: Si, eso dice la gente, pues.

I: ¿Y tú has visto?

C: Las que les coquetean a los hombres, esas son las cualquiera, dicen los hombres, lo dicen...

I: ¿Y tú las has visto... coquetear?

Víctor: 1

INVESTIGADORA: Si ella no se quisiera o no pudiera

cuidarse por alguna razón, ¿tú qué harías?
VICTOR: Me cuidaba y al mismo tiempo la cuidaba.
I: ¿Si? ¿Y qué usarías o cómo?
V: O sea, normal, porque pastillas, espumas y esas cosas como que no, porque contaminan. Preservativos sí. Además, eso evita cualquier contagio...
I: ¿Y por qué no te lo pusiste?
V: No tenía.
I: ¿Pero lo pensaste o no?
V: Si, si lo pensé.
I: ¿Si? ¿Qué paso? ¿Lo pensaste, que deberías de tener un condón pero, lo compraste, lo conseguiste o no?
V: No, no pude.
I: ¿Por qué no pudiste?
V: Las circunstancias. No lo compré, es más ni lo pensé.
I: ¿Y tus papás de que usaras el condón qué pensarían?
V: Que estaría bien, porque ahorita es una responsabilidad, que la situación está muy difícil, pero, o sea, nunca me dicen nada.
I: ¿Cómo? ¿Qué te dicen de eso?
V: No sé, pero, o sea, no porque sí me da como pena que vean y preguntarles a ellos.
I: ¿Por qué? ¿Qué van a pensar si los traes?
V: Pues me da pena. Nada más soy yo el que debe saber y si acaso algún cuate, pero para darme alguna información que me sirviera. Es entre amigos.

Eduardo: 1

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Cuando usted fue con la prostituta por primera vez, ¿qué era lo que esperaba?
EDUARDO: Bueno, yo no esperaba mucho pero sí una satisfacción, por lo menos corporal, ¿no?, que... este...
I: ¡Ah!, o sea, ¿ni siquiera eso hubo?
E: Ni siquiera, no.
I: ¿Por sus nervios?
E: Sí, estaba yo... tenso y ella no tuvo... no sé si no estaba bien pagada, pero nunca tuvo... bueno, no puso de su parte para que yo pudiera... como una pareja, ¿no?, eso era lo que yo esperaba, posiblemente. Por lo menos, este... corporal, pero no.
I: Ajá, una compañera aunque sea, ¿no?
E: Pero no... no sucedió.
I: ¿Entonces ni siquiera tuvo relaciones con ella?
E: No, bueno... sí tuve, pero no tuve orgasmo...
I: ¿No hubo eyaculación?
E: Sí, sí... pero no con la misma satisfacción, ni siquiera cuando ella me masturbaba, ¿sí?, eso fue bastante...
I: Claro, frustrante...
E: Frustrante.
I: ¿Y dice que salió con cara de gusto? ¿Por qué tenía que salir con cara de gusto?
E: Pues, el machismo, sí.
I: ¿Qué le decían los amigos o qué?
E: No, pues 'entonces, ¿sí resististe?', porque como me

metí... no sé cuántos minutos, ¿no?, porque la cuestión que veía que entraba uno y salía y.... luego yo me metí y no salía, ¿sí?

I: ¿Entonces le estaban tomando el tiempo? ¿A ver cuánto tiempo había resistido?

E: Entonces yo no... acababa de empezar y nunca terminé bien. Y aparte de eso, me lavaba y me lavaba el cuerpo, también.

I: ¿Por eso se tardaba y aquellos pensaron que usted llevaba horas ahí?

E: No, sí, pues sí.

I: ¿Y usted considera que hubiera podido decir que no? ¿A esta situación de las prostitutas, usted hubiera podido decir que no?

E: Era un poco difícil.

I: ¿Por qué?

E: Porque no tenía yo... o sea, que se iban acumulando las tentaciones y así, tal vez hubiera podido si... si es que no hubiera tenido esos amigos, ¿no?, también influye mucho, ¿no?, pero ellos son inclusive ahora son amigos, ¿no?, y... y sí platicamos después de aquello, platicamos que no era bien, que que no... ni siquiera era de satisfacción, ¿no?, entonces ya nunca fuimos.

Chapter IV: The construction of gendered subjects of sexuality and the role of sexual knowledge.

Marta: 1

MARTA: ...la ciudad es diferente a un pueblo en muchas cosas. En el modo de vida, en el trato con las personas, en el trato con las personas, en todo, en el desenvolvimiento de uno...

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Y qué..., qué cosas son diferentes aquí?

M: ¿Aquí? Aquí hay muchos complejos. En un pueblo hay muchos complejos, por ejemplo, nosotros que llegamos..., nosotras llegamos y la gente nos veía así, como bichos raros, vamos a decir, ¿no?, porque, pues, nosotros tenemos otras ideas, o sea, no lo digo porque yo me siento superior a las personas, no, no, porque...

I: Sí, pero, ¿por qué piensas diferente?

M: No, porque yo, muchas cosas que yo veo..., que yo veo, siento que están bien, ¿sí?, y ellos esas cosas no las ven, o sea, ¿no?, para ellos no están bien.

Guillermo: 1

GUILLERMO: Sí, pero aquí en el rancho, pus ya ve que los muchachos mandan más que los papás ya...

INVESTIGADORA: ¡Ah!, ¿sí?

G: Pus, las muchachas se salen, se van, y como hay muchos lugares donde se puede [tener relaciones sexuales], por eso.

I: Ajá... ¿Como qué tipo de lugares hay?
G: No, pos ahí en el rancho, está solo en el rancho, ¿no?
I: O sea, ¿en el campo, dice usted?
G: En el campo, sí, sí, pues no hay quién cuide, ni cuidan a uno nada.
I: ¿No? ¿Y a las muchachas tampoco?
G: No, pues, las dejan, muchas las dejan libres a donde quieran...
I: ¿Y usted qué opina de eso, cómo la ve?
G: Pus, que no está bien, no estaría bien, que... pus hay que evitarles que no... que no anden saliendo así mucho... bueno, los papás, y evitarles que salgan mucho, no dejarlas salir mucho, pero ya ve que muchos, ya las dejan que hagan lo que quieran...
I: Ajá...
G: Por eso sí estaría bien.
I: ¿Y por qué?, ¿a qué se arriesgan si salen mucho las muchachas?
G: Pues es... pues es que no se arriesgan, es que no se arriesgan, si no que tienen, yo creo que tienen que... salen a buscar un novio, de todos modos, como salen al agua, allá, como ahí no tenemos agua en el rancho, pus, salen a buscar, a traer agua, a donde hay, y, pus ya, y uno va con ellas platicando y ya, ahí se empieza a enamorar uno de ellas.

Guillermo:2

INVESTIGADORA: Yo pensaba que esto de la historia a la mejor era más fácil, pero..., pero usted dice que no sabe cómo se inician los muchachos, ya me contó que esto de las parrandas sí sucede, ¿no?, pero, ¿sabe qué?, fíjese que muchas veces, a los hombres les dicen, ándale, que ya te toca, que tienes que empezar, no sé si se lo dijeron a usted, así de que órale, ámate...
GUILLERMO: Sí, sí.
I: ¿No? ¿Y si te pasas de un tiempo, luego, ya te ven como que no?
G: Sí
.I: ¿Eres medio lento o medio...?
G: Sí.
I: ¿Sí le pasó eso?
G: Sí.
I: Entonces, este... por eso quería que me contara cómo... cómo hacían allá en el rancho los muchachos para poder empezar su vida sexual...
G: ¡Ah!, pus, que se venían, se venían, y como le digo, buscaban una mujer, ya cuando... ya ve que después, ya de tiempo, ya cuando uno es grande, entonces, ya se le antoja una mujer y venían y buscaban una mujer, veníamos, ya que veníamos y buscábamos una mujer...

Alberto: 1

ALBERTO: esas relaciones son bonitas, pero, o sea, son

bonitas... y más que nada, pus... hay que vivir la vida como... porque si uno va a estar nomás así a... sin tener novia, sin hacer esa relación, tiene que hacerlo uno, tiene que hacerlo, porque pus... son...

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Qué pasaría si no lo hicieras?

A: No sé, es lo que a veces me pregunto, ¿qué pasaría? No, pus, yo, a mi ver, nada.

I: Ajá. Pero, ¿te han dicho que pueden pasar cosas?

A: O sea, se puede...

I: ¿Qué te dicen?

A: No, o sea, uno no... no pasa nada. ¿Es cierto o no es cierto? ¿Verdad que no pasa nada?

I: No, no pasa nada.

A: Entonces, pus...

I: ¿Pero qué te dicen los amigos? ¿Que si no lo haces qué puede pasar?

A: No, o sea... o sea, me dicen, no, pos sí, '¿y a poco no?, ¿a poco nunca lo has hecho?' Nel, pus, antes no. Les digo, 'no, la mera verdad'... Y, o sea, ahí me cotorreaban ¿no?, que... dicen que... que yo no estaba para esas cosas y que era... que era de otra clase. Les digo, 'no, si quieres te lo demuestro'. No, pos esa vez fue y pus fuimos con esas chavas.

I: ¡Ah!... ¿O sea que mucho era la presión de los amigos de que no te dijeran esas cosas?

A: No, o sea que..., los amigos, o sea, que yo a los amigos no les doy gusto, simplemente, ahorita relaciones, pues ya..., o sea, que tengo una vez al mes con chavas así... Voy al centro y pus..., allá busco chavas, vamos a dar la vuelta...

Jesús: 1

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Eso era todo?, y por ejemplo, ¿a tí, en esta idea de proponerle a ella que tuvieran relaciones y todo, este, cómo fue que se te fue formando la decisión y las ganas y la planeación?

JESUS: Ummm... bueno, ummm... la verdad, no, no recuerdo muy bien, no es por temor a decirlo, pero... ummm... recuerdo que fue algo, todo eso... este... salía espontáneamente porque ya sea de su parte o de mi parte, sacábamos el tema...

I: ¡Ah!, ¿entonces, ya andaban picados?

J: ... parece que sí...

I: ... (Risas)...

J: Yo pienso que sí... (Risas)... sí.

I: Ajá.

J: Sí, y ella... ella, recuerdo que me dijo, no sé, sería por los problemas que habíamos tenido y todo eso, decía que ella me quería dar una prueba de amor y me dijo, 'oyes para tí, ¿cual sería el... la prueba de amor?, para demostrarte que te amo y todo...' le dije, 'bueno, pues'... yo en ningún momento le dije, '¿sabes qué?, pues dame tu prueba de amor o ten una relación', no, sino que ella me dijo... recuerdo que me dijo, 'oyes ¿tú estarías dispuesto a todo?' y dice 'a tener relaciones

sexuales...' Pues, no sé, o no es porque yo me lo propusiera, sino, fue una simple pregunta y yo le dije 'pues sí', no por aprovechar el momento, pero...

..I: ¿Tú piensas que ella se... pensaría que eres como aprovechado, si... si te interesa... o si te hubiera interesado mucho tener relaciones con ella?

J: Uhm... no, bueno... ella nunca ha pensado... no, no ten... bueno... Es que, porque me dices, como que, bueno, yo no, yo no lo había pensado, cuando ella me lo propuso, dije, pus sí...

I: Como que no..., no se te veía muy...

J: ¿Algún interés?

?I: ...Muy... clavado en tener relaciones sexuales, sino que fue algo que surgió casi a... a sugerencia de ella.

J: Uhm... bueno, este... perdón, o sea, no fue tanto a sugerencia de ella, sino que, como le digo que sacábamos los dos el tema y tal vez... bueno yo... pues me quería sentir a gusto con ella y todo eso y yo pienso que por eso, lo... lo decidimos...

Gabriela: 2

INVESTIGADORA: ¿No tuvo usted otro novio antes de [su marido]?

GABRIELA: Bueno, sí, ¿para qué le digo no?... uno no es de piedra, ni [de] madera para no sentir, ¿no?

I: Claro.

G: Sí, yo tuve otro, pues otros... ¿cómo le diré?, otras relaciones, pero nada más que noviazgos, de otra cosa nunca.

Soledad: 1

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Oye, Soledad, y tú cómo te explicas... o con qué tendrá que ver este asunto de que la virginidad de las mujeres sea tan importante y la de los hombres no? ¿Por qué...?

S: ¿Piensa así la gente?

I: ¿Piensa así la gente?

S: Bueno, es que yo siento que... que la mujer tiene que llegar virgen al altar, sin que ningún hombre haya pasado por... por ella y un hombre no. Un hombre cree que al tener muchas mujeres es más hombre... y la mujer no. Si la mujer se enreda con aquel muchacho, pues ya no vale, es una sucia y todavía lo siguen diciendo, no las quieren, les reprochan...

I: ¿Y de dónde crees que vendrán esas ideas?

S: Yo creo que de los abuelitos y... mi mamá todavía es de esa idea, pero ya últimamente se le ha quitado...

I: Mmmm... es una sucia, o sea, por ejemplo, una muchacha que tiene relaciones sexuales, incluso que se cuida y que no esté casada, ¿cuál sería la opinión o qué se diría de ella?

S: Pues, que es una loca y todavía ya... o tiene sus hijos y no tiene esposo, ¡ay!, es una loca, aunque, por

ejemplo, la señora sea decente... Pero ya es una loca, o ya anda enredándose...

I: ¿Ya anda qué?

S: Enredándose.

I: ¿Enredándose?

S: Con puros... con otros hombres, y no... porque yo siento que no es así. Además, tiene deseos... yo no lo tomaría así.

Marta: 2

MARTA: Aquí es lo más común, aquí una mujer que no sea virgen, o que por desgracia, ¿no?, le haya fallado su novio o algo así, es lo peor.

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Que le haya fallado? ¿Cómo?

M: Ajá, pues que en un momento dado, ¿no?, si ella por ejemplo, se embarazó y todo y la muchacha tuvo que abortar, que yo estoy en contra del aborto, ¿verdad?, entonces... pero suele suceder, ¿no...?

I: Claro.

M: Entonces, pues, creo que si no la apoyó, entonces todos la tachan como si no pudiera a volver a hacer su vida, pienso que no.

I: O sea que, no sé, una muchacha que no es virgen, ya no... ya no se puede casar, ¿ya no vale?

M: O sea, aquí no.

I: Sí, sí, claro.

M: Porque yo pienso que en otras partes...

I: ¿No importa tanto?

M: No importa. O quizás tampoco importe, depende del tipo de muchacho que sea, porque creo... a veces por más ignorante o como quiera llamarle, que sea un persona, cuando quiere a otra, esas cosas no le importan.

Amanda: 1

AMANDA: Sí pero, incluso él también me... me platicó, porque también él... este... pues... si ya ve que en los hombres es diferente, él estuvo mucho tiempo en los Estados Unidos viviendo y... y pues, tuvo... me imagino que relaciones con varias mujeres, no sólomente con una, con una o dos.

INVESTIGADORA: ¿No lo sabes eso?

A: No, él sí me dijo.

I: ¿Sí te dijo?

A: Sí, me dijo que andaba con dos chavas de allá, que incluso, se había venido para México porque una chava se le había metido mucho, o sea, pues no lo quería dejar en paz, una chava de allá y él se vino para acá, porque él decía, 'la verdad, no me quería comprometer yo, no era el tipo de mujer que yo quería para mí, para vivir...'

I: Pues sí...

A: 'No era el tipo de mujer que quería yo para compartir mi vida'.

I: Y entonces, y él... él... ¿y a tí te importó que él no

fuera virgen cuando se casaron?

A: No.

I: ¿No te importó?

A: No a mí, yo decía, 'si yo lo hice que soy mujer'... o sea, ¿cómo le dijera?, ¿cómo le explicaría?. O sea, yo pensé, 'si a mí me pasó, que soy mujer, que debería ser un poco más reservada, qué no le hubiera pasado a él que es hombre', pensé. A mí no me importó y hasta la fecha, incluso después de que nos casamos, yo le pregunté, 'oye, ¿y tú nunca tuviste relaciones con un chavo de por aquí... con una chava de por aquí?', y dice... y nunca me quería decir, 'dime la verdad, no me voy a enojar', porque yo sabía que a lo mejor él me podía reprochar, y entonces hasta que le saqué la verdad, '¿sabes qué?', dice, 'sí', le digo 'y la conozco', dice, 'sí, incluso fue tu amiga', le digo '¿y qué?, ¿por qué no te casaste con ella?', o... o sea, yo le empezaba a sacar, 'no', dice, 'pues esa mujer ya estaba más correteada que nada', y, 'entonces, ¿por qué conmigo?, ¿por qué conmigo si?', dice, 'porque, es que se ve en la mujer, cuando la mujer... tiene más experiencia, en la forma de comportarse', dice, 'pues, yo la verdad, tú fuiste diferente, diferente a todas las mujeres que yo toqué', dice.

Amanda: 2

AMANDA: Yo a mi esposo nunca le dije la verdad, o sea, yo nunca le dije en qué forma había pasado. Nunca se lo dije, pues por miedo, ¿no?, porque dije, 'si se lo digo..', pues, o sea, yo le dije me había pasado con un muchacho, pero nunca se lo dije en qué forma, simplemente se lo platiqué.

I: ¿O sea, tú le dijiste...? ¿Tú le dijiste que ya no eras virgen?

A: Sí, yo le dije.

I: Pero, pero... o sea ¿cuál es la parte que no le dijiste?

A: O sea, yo no le dije que me había ido voluntariamente con el chavo este al hotel.

I: ¿Entonces, qué le dijiste?

A: Sino que yo le dije lo otro de la muchacha esta que me había llevado a mentiras, así le dije, dije, 'si le digo la que se me va a armar' ¿no?, y yo... o sea, yo lo quiero, y lo quiero un montón. Imagínese, al principio, si ahorita lo quiero, imagínese cuando todavía no lo conocía yo más a fondo, o sea, todavía no compartía yo mis cosas con él, ni él conmigo, entonces, yo estaba con una ilusión, pero yo sí le dije, le digo, '¿sabes qué?, si me quieres, yo ya no soy virgen'... incluso yo tuve relaciones con él también, antes de venirme con él, pues él me aceptó, digo, 'pero mira, yo no quiero que un día tú me vayas a decir...'

I: ¿Pero tú le dijiste que no fue voluntario, que fue forzado?

A: Sí.

I: ¿Y piensas que si le hubieras dicho que fue voluntario, él qué hubiera pensado o qué?

A: Uuuuuh, yo pienso que no me... no creo que me hubiera aceptado.

I: ¿De plano?

A: O a lo mejor, eso pensé, ¿verdad?, porque, pus... nunca, nunca intenté decirle la verdad, simplemente yo pensé eso y hasta ahí.

Patricia: 1

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Para tí sería importante esperar a estar casada para tener una relación sexual?

PATRICIA: No.

I: ¿No?

P: O sea, depende, no qué tal si se dio antes la situación, antes de que yo me casara.

I: ¿Cómo podría ser? ¿Cómo te lo imaginas?

P: Puede suceder en cualquier parte, porque es lo más normal que te excites.

I: ¿Alguna vez te ha pasado que te excites?

P: No.

I: ¿No?

P: No.

I: ¿Solita? ¿Aunque no estén los muchachos?

P: ¿Que me sienta rara?

I: Que te excites, que te sientas excitada.

P: Si, alguna vez.

I: ¿Y cómo te has sentido cuando te pasa eso?

P: Pues me siento rara, como desesperada.

I: ¿Desesperada? ¿Y qué haces?

P: Pues nada, me pongo a pensar en otra cosa o a oír música, si estoy sola me pongo a bailar para hacer algo.

I: ¿No te masturbas? ¿No lo solucionas así?

P: ¿Cómo masturbar?

I: Como acariciarte.

P: No.

Carlos and Fernando: 1

INVESTIGADORA: Ustedes no se han iniciado en su vida sexual... supongo que no por falta de ganas.

CARLOS: Ganas no me faltan [risas]. También hay chavos que van a partes en Oaxaca y unos chavos no se cuidan, como también hay muchas enfermedades y yo me cuido un poco...

FERNANDO: Mejor me aguanto...

C: Es mejor esperar...

F: ... a que seamos más grandes.

C: O también si tienes tu novia puedes hacerlo, pero que estén de acuerdo los dos. Yo pienso que es mejor con tu chava que ir allá.

I: ¿Por qué?

C: Aparte de que a tu chava la quieres y lo vas a hacer con ella, yo pienso que es mejor... aparte, allá tienes

que pagar, me han contado que 50, 200, 300 [pesos].
F: Como te guste.

Claudia: 1

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Y respecto a su cuerpo, señora, sintió como que algo cambiaba o no?

CLAUDIA: Si, cambia uno, porque pues al tener relaciones no, por ejemplo, en mi caso, pues yo estaba un poco más gordita, sí, ya pasados los meses, bajé un poco de peso.

I: ¿O sea que le vino bien?

C: A, imagino que no, porque dicen que cuando uno engorda, este, le va bien, y que cuando baja uno de peso pues le va un poco mal, o sea el cuerpo como que no acepta eso, pues, ¿me entiende?

I: Ah, eso le decían, que si baja de peso el cuerpo no acepta muy bien la sexualidad.

C: Eso.

I: ¿Y usted qué piensa de eso?

C: Bueno, como que no me pasó.

I: ¿Como que no le cayó bien?

C: Pues no, porque como yo, o sea, en vez de engordar más, bajé de peso, o sea estaba más pesada y poco a poco me he repuesto.

I: ¿Y su esposo qué opinaba de que bajaba de peso?

°C: Pues no, él no decía nada.

I: ¿No decía nada?

C: Nada, nada.

I: ¿Quién era la que le decía o el que le decía?

C: Pues mis amigas.

I: ¿Ah, sí?

C: Me veían con mi familia o me veían con sus tatas y me preguntaban qué es lo que tenía, qué me pasaba y yo, pues, digo, ha de ser eso, ¿no?

I: Que no le caía bien, entonces.

C: No, el cuerpo no acepta eso.

I: ¿Y cómo fue, cómo es que ahora se está reponiendo?

C: Porque, este, o sea, pues ya tengo familia, ya soy mamá, eso ayuda bastante para...

I: Claro, claro, entonces ya se está fortaleciendo usted más, claro.

C: Y también estoy mejor también de las manos. Yo ya no tenía manos sanas.

I: ¿Por los embarazos?

C: Pueden ser los embarazos o pueden ser por tanta relación que yo tenía.

I: ¿Y ya bajaron?

C: Sí, ya bajaron. Sí.

I: ¿A petición de usted o porque nada más así pasó?

C: No, o sea de vez en cuando, pues...

Claudia: 2

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Usted sabe cómo su marido perdió la virginidad o no?

CLAUDIA: No, realmente no.

I: ¿No sabe?

C: No, nunca me ha dicho.

I: ¿Usted no piensa que él llegó virgen al matrimonio?

C: ¿Cómo?

I: O sea, él se casó igual que usted o ¿usted cree que ya había tenido relaciones?

C: A, no. Los hombres ahorita, olvídense, ellos en cualquier parte pueden tener relaciones, ellos no se esperan, desde a los quince años, no, el hombre ya. No, y lo pueden hacer con cualquiera.

I: ¿Entonces cree que su marido no se esperó? ¿Y qué opina de eso, señora?

C: ¿Cómo le diré? Pues yo creo que era necesario, ¿no?, para el desarrollo de un hombre, porque a veces, cuando no tienen relaciones, bueno, a la edad de quince años, ya más adelante, este muchas veces se enferman.

I: ¿Cómo de qué?

C: Pues están de mal humor, o luego son pretextos, bueno, un motón de cosas, les duele la cabeza, entonces necesitan tener relaciones.

I: ¿Como que eso les hace crecer mejor?

C: No sé, van desarrollando más, porque uno no cree o sea en la forma que se va desarrollando, va uno creciendo.

Saúl: 3

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Cómo se lo imaginó y cómo..., si fue así como se lo imaginaba, ahora?

SAUL: No, pues no.

I: ¿Cómo se lo imaginaba?

S: Pues, algo bonito, me lo imaginaba bonito, así, tranquilo y todo.

I: ¿Tranquilo?

S: Sí.

I: ¿Qué más? ¿Cómo más se lo imaginaba?

S: Pues, que..., pues sí, así como en las películas y con las revistas, que uno se va al cielo y todo, bien a gusto.

I: ¿Que se va al cielo y todo eso?

S: Sí, pues sí, es cierto, por qué no?

I: ¿Y no fue así?

S: No, pues no fue así, fue algo de que digo, por ejemplo, mi señora me dijo que ya era virgen y no me gustó nada la primera vez.

I: ¡Ah!, ¿su mujer le dijo?

S: Sí. No me gustó nada, dijo que hasta tenía miedo.

Dijo, bueno, eso nada más lo pasa uno y lo capta, ¿verdad? No le responde uno nada, eso de que a ellas también le dicen a uno, tenía miedo o algo, entonces, quiere decir que a lo mejor sí, sí eran vírgenes. O sí es virgen, ¿verdad?, porque sea por lo ignorante, o sea por lo que haya sentido, a la mejor sí.

I: ¿Sí tenía miedo? Claro.

S: Sí era virgen, ¿verdad?

I: ¿Y para usted es muy importante que ella sea virgen?

S: Pues, mire, yo..., ella me dio amor o me dio cariño, para mí no era importante que fuera virgen o no, la verdad, yo lo que quería era casarme, buscar la pareja y pasarla bien, no me importaba si era virgen o no.

I: ¿No le importaba?

S: No, así hubiera podido suceder que me hubiera casado con ella o con la que quiera, quería tener una familia. Al contrario, el amor que yo quería de mi pareja era lo que yo quería, no me importaba.

Amanda: 3

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Cómo fue que se casaron?, ¿cómo fue que se pusieron de acuerdo?

AMANDA: No, es que él ya... este, después tuvimos... una vez que fuimos también a... no, él me fue a ver y esa vez, pues me fui con él, yo le pedí que me llevara con él, dice, 'no, pero cómo te voy a llevar, te llevo a mi casa', dice, 'pero está mi hermana, no, está mi mamá', y ya fuimos, ¿no?, y tuvimos relaciones, nos regresamos y entonces le dije... y entonces, él me palticó... me dijo, dice, 'ya había tenido relaciones', o sea él no... no vió la diferencia, no sé si... si no vería la diferencia o no la sintió, no sentiría la diferencia o no me quería ofender. Me dijo, 'ya has tenido relaciones con otro hombre antes', fue cuando le dije, pero yo nunca le dije las cosas como fueron, sino que le dije que sí, y le digo, '¿y qué piensas ahora tú de mí?', dice, 'no, pues nada, ¿cómo que nada?', le digo, 'algo tienes que pensar'. Dice, '¿y nada más simplemente con un hombre has tenido relaciones?', le digo, 'pues la verdad sí' y dice, '¡ah!', y se quedó pensando, y le digo yo, '¿qué?, ¿van a cambiar las cosas entre nosotros?', dice, 'no, ¿por qué?', me dijo así, pero así tan tranquilo, le digo, '¿qué, a tí no te importa?', dice, 'no', dice...

I: ¿Y eso para tí fue una sorpresa?

A: ¡Uh, sí!, un alivio.

I: ¿Un alivio?

A: Dije, uh, ya no me rechazó...

Claudia: 3

INVESTIGADORA: Si no es muy, muy entrometido de mi parte, señora, a mí me gustaría que usted me contara si hubo durante su adolescencia cuando era usted muy joven algún chance de platicar con alguien sobre los cambios que iba teniendo su cuerpo?

CLAUDIA: ¿Con el desarrollo? Pues en la escuela que estudiaba, sí nos platicaban sobre eso, que, este, de uno ya se va formando, le salen senos, y o sea, ya la cadera, se hace más grande, hay cambios siempre, siempre, este, entonces también cuando llega la menstruación.

I: ¿Cómo, se lo platicaron en la escuela?

C: Sí.

I: ¿No, no en su casa?

C: No, en la casa no, porque mis papás, precisamente mi mamá era un poco, como le diré, una persona analfabeta, tenía miedo a conocer de eso, entonces uno como va a la escuela ya entiende muchas cosas, entonces por eso me di cuenta, porque mi mamá nunca me platicó de que me iba a pasar eso, antes, pues, o sea que ya me debió avisar, antes, yo supongo, ya que se da uno cuenta cuando sus hijas ya andan reglando.

I: ¿Y dice que ustedes, algo así como que no se atrevieron a decirle?

C: No.

I: ¿Y por qué eso?

C: Ajá, nunca nos platicaba sobre la relación sexual.

I: ¿Y por qué cree usted que no les contaron de eso?

C: Supongo yo que por la vergüenza, ¿no? Se cohiben pues al tenerle confianza a sus hijos, sus hijas, ...

I: ¿Usted qué cree que sienten ellos? ¿Qué podría pasar si les cuentan a sus hijos, sus hijas?

C: Pues que les están enseñando cosas que no deben saber, pienso yo.

I: Sí, sí, está bien, como que les abren los ojos o algo así.

C: Les abren los ojos y para ellos es una cosa mala.

I: Mmm, ¿como vergonzoso?

C: Vergonzoso pues, y no deben de, por decir, les están metiendo en la mente cosas que no deben de saber, pues yo creo que hicieron mal, porque ahorita ya ve, que ahorita ya la gente sabe todo, los niños pues ya saben de todo, así que a los niños ya no se les engaña.

José: 1

INVESTIGADORA: ¿cómo se inician o cómo se iniciaría una muchacha, aquí en Teotitlán?

JOSE: Realmente, no podría yo contestarle esa pregunta, porque le digo, no conozco bien a las muchachas de acá, ¿no? Sí he tenido amigas, pero... pero no platico con ellas del sexo... con ellas, porque, pus... me siento muy incómodo, a pesar de que jugamos así muy fuerte, pero no he llegado al extremo de hablarles del sexo, por... me siento... tal vez, ellas se sentirían ofendidas, si yo... pus, si no me entienden lo que yo quiero decir...

I: ¿Las puedes perder y todo?

J: No, no temor a perderlas, si no a ofenderlas y yo a sentirme mal, porque nadie me puede comprender, si yo quiero hablar con ellas de eso.

I: Ajá... que tu intención no es hacerlo con ellas, sino...

J: ...no es eso, sino platicar del sexo, conocerlas...

I: Claro. Y ha de ser difícil si tú tienes esas preguntas y esas inquietudes...

J: Pues sí, ellas se sentirían ofendidas porque tal vez nunca les hablaran en su casa o tal vez sí... y amigas que he tenido, pus... han terminado su secundaria o a veces no la terminan, hay algunas que ni siquiera terminaron su secundaria y pus...

I: ¿Y eso..., y eso a tí se te hace muy importante para platicar de estos temas?

J: Pues sí porque...

I: ¿Haber podido estudiar un poquito?

J: Sí, sí, porque un niño de primaria, que termina su primaria... pus apenas nada más, empiezan en unas páginas con los aparatos reproductores y toda la cosa y hay muchachas que tienen muchísimo tiempo de haber terminado la primaria y... y al nivel que yo he estudiado, pus ya es una cosa muy diferente. Hablar del sexo ya es algo normal. Inclusive en bachillerato te habla el maestro de biología y te dice las cosas ya abiertamente. Aquí si se lo dices a una muchacha de acá, que terminó hasta primaria, entonces la vas a ofender y tú te vas a sentir incómodo.

I: Claro...

J: Porque no puedes explicarte, o ella no te entiende, o tú no la entiendes a ella.

I: ¿Se te puede malinterpretar?

J: Pues sí, o que tú quieres algo con ella hablando de sexo, eso es algo muy difícil que yo puedo explicarle, ¿no?

I: Claro, ¿y que no te pasa con las muchachas allá en Oaxaca?

J: Pues sí, sí. En Oaxaca... pues en Oaxaca son tus compañeras, han sido mis compañeras y pues eso, hablar de eso, pues es ofenderla, porque inclusive el maestro llega y te ríes, y te pregunta '¿por qué te ríes?', dice, '¿si es tu cuerpo?' Ese es nuestro cuerpo, ¿no? Y acá, pos no, es muy diferente.

I: ¿Cómo piensan del cuerpo por acá?

J: Pos acá, realmente las mujeres no... no han tenido experiencias así de decirle, no he platicado, porque si uno pudiera platicar de ese tipo de cosas con ellas, pus... ya te dijeran, ¿no?, de esto piensan de nuestro cuerpo.

I: Pues sí, pero, ¿no conoces, no sabes?

J: No.

I: ¿Lo único que sabes es que no puedes hablar de eso?

J: Sí, de eso sí estoy seguro, porque...

I: ...¿porque las ofendes?

J: Puedo ofenderlas a ellas y yo me puedo sentir incómodo, porque nadie me puede entender qué es lo que quiero yo, a dónde quiero yo llegar, hablando de sexo, ¿no? No quiero decir, 'pues quiero que hagamos el sexo y toda la cosa', sino que...

I: ¿Es nada más por platicar?

J: Es nada más por platicar...

Chapter V: **The moral dimension of sexuality: evil, the sacred and rituals of sexual initiation.**

Claudia: 4

INVESTIGADORA: Y cuando se casó señora, no estaba asustada o ¿cómo era su expectativa del matrimonio?

CLAUDIA: Mucho, de la primera vez que estuvimos juntos.

I: ¿Como si nada, o qué? ¿No esperaba nada o si esperaba, o cómo o le daba curiosidad?

C: Pues curiosidad si, pues como le digo, pues, este, yo, muchas de mis compañeras me platicaban, ya eran casadas, entonces me decían esto y lo otro, pues yo la curiosidad si tenía, pues entonces gracias a Dios que encontré fuerzas porque como uno está solita, pues y ya.

I: ¿Tenía así como deseos de estar con él? ¿Le gustaba su esposo o más bien como que prefería estar sola?

C: A no, no, o sea quería estar sola.

I: Si, ¿y cómo le fue la primera vez?

C: Pues un poco difícil, ¿ve? Porque como uno, pues no sabe, pues si bastante difícil para uno, entonces dije que bueno, que yo pues, me cuidé porque también a veces pasa, como uno se va a trabajar no faltará quién, que un hombre que la, como ahorita hay tantas violaciones, ¿no?, lo que si gracias a Dios nunca me pasó nada, me entregué a él como debe de ser, sin ningún problema.

I: ¿Y por qué dice que fue difícil, señora, la primera vez, o qué fue lo que les costó trabajo o qué pasó?

C: Pues como le digo, pues que, pues como uno no sabe, y es un poco penoso, duele, ¿no?, ni modo.

I: ¿Le dolió?

C: Si.

I: ¿Y además de que le dolió tenía, tenía miedo o algo más?

C: No, no tenía miedo, porque como le digo que ya había comentado con mis compañeras de trabajo.

I: ¿Qué le habían dicho sus compañeras?

C: No, pues que duele, que sangra uno, que pues, que va a tener uno y que pues que es bonito, pues, es bonito.

I: ¿Y entonces le dolió y si sangró o no sangró?

C: No, si, mucho.

I: ¿Si sangró mucho? ¿Se asustó?

C: No.

I: ¿No?

C: Era natural, como ya quería un hijo.

I: ¿Ya sabía? ¿Entonces no se asustó?

C: Aunque mi mamá, principalmente, nunca me platicó de eso.

I: ¿Y su esposo qué decía de eso? De que si sangrara, ¿no dijo nada del hecho de que si sangrara, o que le doliera, no dijo que qué bonito que era virgen?

C: Pues si era, se quedó satisfecho, creo, porque realmente me encontró bien.

I: ¿Y usted?

C: Pues también, también, que bueno, ¿no?, porque ya ve que dicen que también puede uno perder la virginidad, no

la puede perder uno exactamente, pero, cuando si sufre uno caídas, pues se desvía uno, ¿no?, es lo que dicen por aquí.

Bertina: 2

INVESTIGADORA: Oye, Bertina, y cuando estabas con este muchacho y pensabas, 'bueno, a lo mejor me embarazo'... ¿tú dirías que eso sucedió así de improviso?

BERTINA: Sí, de improviso.

I: ¿Tú no lo habías pensado uno o dos días antes?

B: No.

I: ¿No?

B: Ni él, nomás fue así, de repente.

I: ¿De repente? ¿Y no te dió miedo? ¿Te dió puro gusto, estabas muy a gusto o te dió miedo?

B: Pues cuando me sentí mal si, si me dió miedo.

I: ¿Pero después?

B: Ahí... después, de pronto no, pero después sí, porque sí... sí me puse bien mala.

I: ¿Te pusiste muy mala después?

B: Me pegó vómito, diarrea.

I: ¿Y entonces te sentiste muy mal y le fuiste a decir a tu mamá?

B: Sí, pues yo tuve que decirle.

I: ¿Y por qué te sentías tan mal, Bertina?

B: Pos... pos no sé, yo... yo me sentía mal. Dije, 'a lo mejor algo... algo tengo por haber hecho eso o equis cosa'.

I: ¡Ah!, o sea, ¿te asustaste cuando te enfermaste?

B: Sí, sí me asusté.

I: ¡Ah!, ¿o antes de que te enfermaras?

B: No, yo le dije a mi mamá... dice, 'pus... te ha de haber hecho algo mal, algo que siente...' que me sentía mal, mal, mal, le tuve que decir, la mera verdad yo no le quería decir por timidez, que siempre uno tiene timidez a sus padres, de que le... de que le iban a decir, la irán a regañar, la irán a correr o equis cosa. Pero yo, cuando me pasó eso, yo... yo nomás... mi hermana 'te hizo mal algo', ya luego que me sentí más mal, mal, mal, le tuve que decir y llorando.

I: ¿Ya porque ya te sentías... ya estabas vomitando y con diarrea y no sabían qué tenías?

B: Y ya luego le tuve que decir la verdad a mi mamá.

Mercedes: 1

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Y... y por qué crees que este asunto de que tú seas virgen para casarte, es tan importante, qué es lo... qué es lo importante de ser virgen para casarse?, ¿qué quiere decir, o por qué resulta tan valioso?

MERCEDES: Pues, podría ser por el valor que el... que el hombre la da a la mujer, ¿no?

I: Ajá...

M: Por el... porque si eres virgen, pues, este... te valoran un poquito más o..., y más te están diciendo, '¡ay! no, tú ya quién sabe por cuántos habías pasado' y...

I: O sea, ¿que si, si tú no eres virgen, o si una muchacha no es virgen cuando se casa, este... como que ya ha tenido, bueno, muchos hombres...?

M: Ajá...

I: Y eso es... ¿eso por qué se juzga, o por qué es, el que haya una muchacha tenido otras relaciones...?

M: Pues, yo... yo creo que no se debería de juzgar porque, o sea... los hombres no nos deberían de juzgar porque ellos, pues, también tienen sus experiencias y hasta más, con más libertad que uno, ¿no?

I: Mmmm...

M: Entonces, este... pero, muchas veces, más bien, el hombre nunca lo ha entendido, ni creo que lo entienda.

Amanda: 4:

AMANDA: ...llegó mi mamá, se había ido a San Miguel y llegó bien enojada... 'oyes, que me dijeron esto y esto de tí'.

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Qué le dijeron?

A: Que le habían dicho que... que me habían visto desnuda con un hombre, que debajo de un puente... un puente que está aquí sobre la carretera. Y luego, pues yo sentí coraje ¿no?, pero '¿por qué, si yo nunca he hecho eso, por qué, por qué la gente dice eso de mí?'... y yo seguía escuchando, y me dijo 'sí es cierto...' 'Mira', le dije, 'si tú le quieres creer a la gente, créele, si tú no confías en mí, allá tú', pero ',ira'... o sea que casi me quería pegar. 'Mira, mamá, yo... yo nunca he hecho nada de lo que te han dicho, si tú lo quieres creer, puedes creerlo, es más, dime quién fue la persona que te lo dijo', pero así llorando yo ¿no?, 'no sería así como estoy, si no, dime la persona que te lo dijo', le digo, 'te juro que 'horita soy capaz de matarla', le dije a mi mamá, porque yo sentía coraje, decía, '¿por qué a mí me levantan esos falsos si yo nunca he hecho nunca nada de ese tipo, por qué?... Dice mi mamá, 'no, pues, me dijo la señora que...'. '¿Pero, cuál señora?', 'no, no te voy a decir'. Porque ella me veía enojada y con el cuchillo que hasta lo apretaba yo así con las manos, le digo, 'qué señora', 'no te voy a decir qué señora', dice, 'pero eso sí te digo, si andas haciendo lo que me dijeron', dice, 'vas a ver' y 'pero pus ¿qué me puedes hacer?'. 'No', dice, 'pues yo sabré'. Bueno, pues desde entonces, mi mamá todavía se traumó más con los chismes y apenas me salía, por ejemplo, con mis amigas, mis amigas no me podían ir a ver...

I: ¿De ahí del rancho?

A: Sí, porque mi mamá me decía 'ahí vienen ya tus compañeras', siempre me decía así, 'ahí vienen ya tus compañeras por tí', dice, 'seguro ya te vas a largar con tus compañeras'... o sea, que me empezaba ahí a regañar.

Yo decía, 'no, mamá', le digo, 'mira, si yo me voy no es para hacer nada malo', digo, 'yo me voy a ir, yo tengo ganas, como ellas de salir a la calle', le digo, 'porque, pues a lo mejor a tí cuando estabas chica no te dejaron por alguna razón', le digo, 'pero tú, ¿por qué razón?'. No, que 'por lo que dicen de tí', le digo. 'Pero yo te estoy diciendo que no me voy a hacer nada malo, no voy a ir a hacer nada malo, mamá'. Y empezó a agarrarme confianza, empezó a agarrarme confianza, pero de todos modos ella siempre iba... siempre andaba atrás de mí.

I: ¡Ah!, ¿sí?

A: A donde quiera que iba, iba atrás de mí, nada más cuidándome.

Armando: 1

INVESTIGADORA: y ¿no le costó trabajo esperarse hasta que conociera a su esposa?

ARMANDO: No, no. Es que, como le digo, realmente, también había veces que... me ponía a pensar que... que si podía tener relaciones, podía a la mejor embarazar a la...

I: ¿A la muchacha?

A: A la muchacha que tuviera.

I: Ajá.

A: Y luego, digo, 'pus... si no, no la quiero, pus no, no tendría caso', es que... hay muchas veces que dicen, no, pus... 'qué, ora te casas con ella, que ya le hiciste la maldad o algo', ¿verdad?

I: Ajá.

A: Entonces, por eso pensaba, dije 'no, pus..., yo las quiero, si, pero, pero está... está difícil' para que después salgan con eso y... y luego, no, no la quiere uno demasiado.

I: ¿Sí?

A: O no la ama, ¿verdad?

I: Ajá.

A: Por eso, entonces, por eso me esperé.

Mercedes: 2

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Y cómo... cómo te fue con eso de que eras virgen con tu marido?

MERCEDES: Pues yo, yo se lo dije desde un principio... Yo se lo dije, y pues sí... se desilusionó un poco... pero me dijo, 'pues, qué bueno que me lo dices y te lo agradezco porque...

Y... pero... pero pues, yo de todos modos te acepto'.

I: Mmm... ¿Y cómo te sentiste de esa respuesta?

M: Este... pues, sí... como... pues un poquito mal, porque pues, ¿cómo ellos sí pueden tener todas las experiencias del mundo y uno no?...

I: Claro... o sea, como que no te gustó que te dijera... 'bueno, pues te acepto', ¿no?, este...

M: Ajá...

I: ¿Y no le dijiste eso?
M: No, de momento no...
I: ¿No se te ocurrió?
M: No, no se me ocurrió...
I: ¿Y ahora, con el tiempo que lo piensas...?
M: Pues... pues yo lo que le he dicho a él, '¿por qué, por qué los hombres son así? ¿Por qué ustedes cómo sí pueden tener todas las experiencias si... si el valor de una mujer no está en eso?, dime... Sino en sus sentimientos de uno o en cualquier otra cosa'...
I: Mmm... ¿Y qué te responde?
M: No, pues que... que no, que las mujeres... de una mujer es más... más... pues más... ¿qué te diré?, este... más recatadas...

Patricia: 2

INVESTIGADORA: O sea, para tu mamá ¿tú que pensarías que es la sexualidad? ¿Para tu mamá, cómo la ve?
PATRICIA: Yo creo que mi mamá lo ve como lo ven muchos, lo más sagrado, por ejemplo, los que dicen, la virginidad es lo que tiene que quedar más y yo pienso que no.
I: ¿Tú piensas que no? ¿Por qué?
P: Porque si la virginidad psicológica, si por ejemplo hay niñas que nacen sin esa membrana y a poco por eso dejan de ser vírgenes, como que si se cayeron, si se lastimaron y se les rompió no han dejado de ser vírgenes.
I: Pero, ¿la virginidad psicológica?
P: Si, si me importa.
I: Es como es, o sea, ¿Cómo la definirías?
P: O sea, yo la definiría como la virginidad como es la membrana, como un prejuicio y la psicológica como yo te puedo decir a tí, yo sigo siendo virgen y a lo mejor ya no lo soy. Y a lo mejor si me operé y te puedo decir que no soy virgen y qué tal si, si, nada más para engañarte, o sea que cuando yo sepa que ya no soy virgen, pues ya no soy.

Eduardo: 2

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Y cómo... y cómo te decidiste o cuál era la...? ¿Estaban en qué situación? ¿Nada más así saliendo de la casa, 'órale', vamos o se habían tomado unas copas o cómo?
EDUARDO: No, realmente, cuando... cuando fui yo, ya me habían platicado que ya ellos habían ido y que... que dicen, bueno, ya habían tenido sus frustraciones ellos, porque la verdad dicen que... o no sé si me lo contaron después, pero la cuestión es que uno se siente frustrado, porque la verdad, por ejemplo, a mí, tenía otras ilusiones...
I: ¿Qué esperabas?
E: Bueno, yo soñaba con... con un amor limpio, así de pareja y llegar a... al matrimonio, así como la mujer ¿no?, queriendo y... igualmente, así, como se dice,

virgen, ¿no?, y que fuera realmente bonito, ¿no?, pero las tentaciones a veces son otras, ¿no?

Soledad: 2

INVESTIGADORA: ¿qué idea tendrías tú de una muchacha que tuvo relaciones sexuales antes de casarse?, ¿qué pensarías?

SOLEDAD: O sea, ¿qué pensaría yo de la muchacha?, pues no, creo... o sea, no... no me asombraría...

I: Mmmm...

S: No me asombraría, ahora que... nos han platicado, hemos visto más... no me asombraría, pero, yo creo que antes... al no ver... ¿cómo se dice?... ummm... pláticas de sexualidad o algo así...

I: Mmmm...

S: ¡Ay!, pues, qué cochinas..., pero, ¿cochinas por qué?, porque es su cuerpo de uno, ¿no?, ¿por qué van a decirles cochinas?, pero, ahora en sí, sí, no...

I: ¿Y antes sí pensabas como que era cochinada?

S: Antes sí, ¡ay, sí!, ¡ay!, ¡que sucia!, o..., o cuantos hombres no habrán pasado por ella o..., o señalarla, ¡ay!, mira ya viste, no te juntes o..., a andar de más..., no nada más con él, cuantos más...

I: Mmmm...

S: Mmmm, ahora no.

I: ¿Ahora piensas distinto?

S: Ahora distinto.

Saúl: 4

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Cómo fue su primera relación sexual? Porque eso es lo que yo estoy tratando de investigar. Que me cuente, así, la historia, cómo estuvo y cómo se sintió.

SAUL: Sí. Bueno, se supone que la primera... que la primera vez, es la primer noche, uno de casa...

I: ¡Ah!, ¿con su mujer?

S: Sí.

I: Pero, yo digo, la de usted...

S: ¡Ah!, ¿no?, ¿la primera, la mía?

I: La de usted.

S: No, pues, la mía, la verdad la pasé muy mal, fue muy mala.

I: ¿Cómo estuvo?

S: Porque me las... cuando vi que me echaron a las muchachas... nos echaron a las muchachas, ¿no?, pues, en el suelo, en un petatillo por ahí... En lo oscuro, ¿no?, y yo no sabía ni qué y luego, yo encima, no, pues, hasta la apachurro. Dice, 'ora, me estás apachurrando, no, no es por ahí', dice. ¡Ah!, caray, yo bien apenado, la primer palabra, ¿verdad? '¿Sabes qué?, es por acá, más abajito, acomódate bien, mira, así y así', a la mejor una poquilla instrucción...

I: Ajá. O sea que...

S: Ellas por su dinero...
 I: ¿Ella le enseñó a usted un poquito por dónde era?
 S: Sí, sí, exactamente, sí.
 I: ¿Y luego qué tal?
 S: Bueno, pues, luego, ya lo demás, ya, poco a poquito.
 ¿Y ésta, cómo se portó?, ¿cómo se portó esta mujer con usted, la primera vez?
 S: Bien, se portó bien.
 R: ¿Sí?
 S: No, pues yo me sentí incómodo, me sentía muy incómodo.
 I: ¿Y por qué lo hizo?
 S: Pues, nada más por presiones, por ir por presiones, así, de los demás. Dicen, 'órale, que te toca tu primera comunión y que ándale, ya hasta están ahí en la puerta, echando que quién sabe qué, a ver qué, hasta que te lo dice la gente y todo... Uno no..., uno no se siente bien así, dice una palabra de una tía que tengo ahí, en Celaya, bien cohibido, dice.
 I: Pues, sí.
 S: Bien cohibido, ni gozarla.
 I: Ajá. ¿Entonces no pudo ni gozar de tanto que lo presionaban?
 S: Sí, no, pues claro. Simplemente se da uno un pasón y sale uno.
 I: ¿Y salió bien rápido de ahí?
 S: Sí, rápido...
 I: ¿Y usted qué cree, que lo estaban esperando los amigos?
 S: Sí, no, sí, todo eso.
 I: ¿Y les tuvo que contar?
 S: Claro, todo se contaba así, como palabrerío, como vulgaridad, como sea, todo se contaba, 'hice esto y esto y esto', como bueno o como malo. Otros decían, 'a la mejor te fue así, o a lo mejor te fue así y asá...'
 I: Andele, ¿y lo felicitaban o qué hacían?
 S: Sí, no, 'pues sí es valiente, pasó la primera comunión, vamos con otro'.
 I: ¡Ah!...
 S: Y a la siguiente semana o a los quince días, agarramos otro por ahí...

Aurelio: 1

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Y qué han platicado o qué?
 AURELIO: Bueno...o sea... hemos consultado libros sobre métodos anticonceptivos, de los más fáciles está el ritmo, sobre el método del ritmo y se nos hizo más fácil y no nos preocupamos.
 I: O sea, ¿qué es lo que les preocupa?
 A: Preocuparme, me da miedo.
 I: ¿Te da miedo? ¿Qué cosa?
 A: De que salga embarazada.
 I: ¿Y lo han platicado? ¿qué bien, qué bueno!
 A: Si, si, lo he platicado con ella mucho.
 I: Y ella también quiere y todo.
 A: Si.

I: Y, ¿de qué otros métodos han platicado?

A: Lo que pasa es que hay varios, o sea, de los dos son esos. El preservativo y el ritmo.

I: ¿Y ella no podría consultar un doctor para ver cuál es el mejor?

I: Sabes, lo que no sabemos es con quién o dónde, pero si lo hemos pensado.

I: ¿Cómo podrían... digo, porque podrían: una, ir al centro de salud que queda por aquí cerca y consultar por algún método anticonceptivo, o podrían empezar a utilizar el preservativo, pero no te veo muy convencido. ¿O sea que la misma relación los pone nerviosos, no sólo el embarazo y todo eso, sino también al momento mismo les da nervios?

A: Si.

I: Si, claro, lógico ¿no? Si nunca lo has hecho.... y ¿qué crees que les da más miedo, el asunto del embarazo o el asunto en el momento de tener las relaciones?

A: O sea, lo que pasa es que.... o sea, nos dan nervios en el momento, pero también después, lo que pasa es que ya ahorita hay mucho miedo al SIDA.

SIC: Si, está bien, tienes razón, ¿ella no...?

A: O sea, lo que pasa es que, en parte ella también, lo que pasa es que, o sea... nuestras familias son casi con el mismo tipo de costumbres.

I: ¿Cómo es eso?

A: O sea, lo que pasa es de que... de que no se casen chicas, de que no hagan esto, no hagan lo otro, que no sé qué, pero lo que pasa después es que nos van a decir, 'ahora que se aplaquen' y cosas así y después, pues en caso de embarazo, o sea, que yo le dijera 'O.K. nos casamos', pero en caso de embarazo.

I: ¿Pero en caso de embarazo, qué?

A: Si, o sea, yo le dije que no habría ningún problema.

I: ¿Que la ibas a apoyar? Pero ¿prefieren que eso no vaya a pasar?

A: No.

Soledad: 3

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Y tú qué crees, cuál era la razón de que te controlaran más?, ¿o por qué crees que les preocupa tanto?

SOLEIDAD: Pues, yo creo que porque... pues porque era mujer, o por que soy mujer.

I: Pero, ¿eso qué tiene que ver?

S: Pues, yo creo que pensaban que si yo me salía por ahí, me iban a... a manosear, iba a perder la virginidad...

I: Uhm.

S: O que siempre el qué dirán...

I: Uhm.

S: Si veían a aquella muchacha... me veían platicando... 'esa ya se acostó con el fulano o... esa ya se acostó con sutano', y el qué dirán, el señalar...

I: Uhm.

S: Claro, el hombre también pierde lo mismo, ¿no?, pero

pues, siempre decían que... que a lo mejor porque nos íbamos a otros lugares, o porque habían muchachos muy amañados que... que si se lo proponían, pues a uno lo deshonraban...

I: Uhm, uhm.

S: Ese... ese era su pensamiento...

I: ¿Y cuál sería ...el problema de perder la virginidad?... o de que te deshonraran?, ¿cuál es... el miedo, o ¿por qué... por qué preocupa tanto?

S: O sea, para mis papás pues a mí me decía mucho mi mamá, 'es que mira', decía, 'cuando la muchacha pierde la virginidad, si la pierde con el que se va a casar, 'ora sí que ya fregó, pero, si no...'

I: ¿Cómo ya fregó?

S: O sea, que ya la hizo...

I: ¿Ya la hizo, ya amarró?

S: Ya amarró, ¿no?, pues, si con el chavo que... que la deshonró se casa, la va a respetar, pero no es cierto... bueno 'ora ya mi... el mío es otro pensar, es mentira, porque por ejemplo, si te deshonra, pues, no necesariamente te deshonra el que se va a casar contigo, pero no es mucha importancia la virginidad, porque pues te va a pegar...

Eduardo: 3

INVESTIGADORA: ¿Pero cómo le hicieron?, porque no es fácil aquí en el pueblo.

EDUARDO: Sí, este... ella tiene amigas y... y fueron y me invitaron a ir por el monte, ¿no?, a traer leña, entonces, yo... este, yo no fui a traer leña, sino que fui por ella, ¿no?, y por allá, pues, nos escapamos, ¿no?, este...

I: ¡Ah!, ¿ella se fue al monte y entonces le mandó llamar?

E: Ajá. O sea, que ya sabía yo qué día iban a ir y fui con ellas, ¿no?, y así sucedió como dos veces. Otra vez ella...

I: ¿Pero, ella aceptó fácil tener relaciones con usted o no?

E: No, no, casi fue... o sea, yo casi exigí mucho, ¿no?, yo fui el que exigió esto, o sea... cambió mucho la mentalidad que tenía con mi primera novia, ¿no?, cambió... por eso le decía que cuando yo me casé con ella... aún después de haber tenido contacto con ella, no... no la quería así pues, así como... como soñaba yo, ¿no?, sino que fue sucediendo casi como un juego, así, casi... y así sucedió.

I: ¿Pero, cómo es que... o sea, ella se arriesgaba mucho, ella... y ella era virgen cuando usted tuvo relaciones con ella?

E: Pues, la verdad no sé.

I: ¿No sabe?

E: No porque es difícil, porque... o sea, no fue una... por ejemplo... ¡ah!, parados lo hicimos, ¿no?, entonces es difícil... saber para mí... y yo no tengo experiencia,

pues, de decir que esto se siente cuando uno es virgen.
I: ¿No sabe cuando cómo... se le...? ¿No sabe?
E: No, no, la verdad no sé... solamente cuestión teórica, ¿no?, de que... pero sí sé que ella sí reaccionó de una manera... bueno, para mí, como la primera vez, no... se quejó, se...
I: ¡Ah!, ¿le dolió?
E: Sí... y, pos no..., la penetración no podía ser.
I: Ajá.
E: ...fuerte, ¿no?, porque... le dolía, ¿no?
I: Ajá.
E: Eso fue la...
I: ¿Eso es lo que usted sabe?
E: La reacción que tuvo ella, pero, la verdad, digo, como yo no sabía nada, pues, entonces para mí, que no sabía nada, sino que solamente, inclusive dentro de mi pensamiento llevaba una... casi estaba... estaba jugando, no sabía... inclusive, creo que era como pasar el rato y tal vez iba a dejarla, pues, eso... eso era lo que yo estaba pensando.
I: ¿Y cómo se decidió a no dejarla?
E: Cuando... cuando nos casamos la... este... cuando nos fugamos, entonces, ahí fue... cuando decidí a la hora de... de que le dije, 'te vas a casar conmigo', porque nunca le había dicho que me iba a casar con ella, entonces, a la hora que yo le dije que... 'ora sí, vamos a casarnos', y dijo ella, 'sí', entonces, desde ese momento yo... adquiriré esa responsabilidad que dice su mamá que ya... que ya no se me metió la idea de dejarla, pues.
I: ¿De dejarla? ¿Y eso fue antes de que se escaparan?
E: No, en el momento de casarse, en ese.
I: ¿En ese momento?
E: O sea, que en el momento de que yo me escapé, sabía que ya no podía yo retroceder en nada, sino que iba yo a responder como... como marido...