Competing Everyday Discourses: The Construction of Heterosexual Risk-taking Behaviour among Adolescents in Nicaragua
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Competing Everyday Discourses: The Construction of Heterosexual Risk-taking Behaviour among Adolescents in Nicaragua

– Towards a Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health Empowerment

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CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 11

1.1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................. 11

1.2 THE INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY .... 13

1.3 THE PROBLEM .............................................................. 14

1.3.1 Complications of Sexual Activity ......................... 14

1.3.2 Subordination and Risk ...................................... 15

1.3.3 Poverty and Risk ............................................... 16

1.3.4 It Is Not Self-Evidently about Lack of Information
or Knowledge......................................................... 18

1.3.5 Overconfidence in the Power of Mass Media....... 20

1.3.6 Morality and the Mass Media ............................. 21

1.3.7 We know too little about the cultural logic and
subjective rationality behind sexual risk-taking
behaviour............................................................ 22

1.4 OBJECTIVES .............................................................. 24

1.4.1 To explore the discursive processes and practices
through which young people construct their cognitive
and affective basis for sexual activity and
preparedness for promoting their own sexual
and reproductive health ....................................... 24

1.4.2 To explore what there is to learn from ongoing
empowerment activities ...................................... 27

1.4.3 To indicate a platform for interventions
towards empowerment ..................................... 27

1.5 ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT ................................. 28
2 THEORETICAL FRAMING .......................................................... 31

3 DESIGN AND ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROGRESS ................................................................. 43

3.1 THE CONTRIBUTION OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES 44
  3.1.1 Content and Discourse Analysis ........................................ 44
  3.1.2 Reception Analysis .......................................................... 46
  3.1.3 From Traditional Communication Research
to Cultural Analysis .......................................................... 47

3.2 THE CONTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH TO EMPOWERMENT AND CHANGE ........ 48
  3.2.1 What is Participatory Action Research? ......................... 48
  3.2.2 Reducing the distance between knowledge and action............................. 52

3.3 FROM A PAR ATTEMPT TO A TRADITIONAL QUALITATIVE APPROACH ................................................................. 54
  3.3.1 Snowball Strategy ......................................................... 54
  3.3.2 Longitudinal study ......................................................... 54
  3.3.3 Collaborating Organizations ............................................ 55

4 MAJOR COMPETING DISCOURSES OF SEXUALITY, REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS
  - RELIGIOUS VERSUS RADICAL FEMINIST FORCES ........ 59

  4.1 THE SEXUAL EDUCATION BATTLE ........................................ 59
  4.2 THE CATHOLIC HEGEMONY CHALLENGED
  - A PROFOUND CRISIS OF THE TRUTH .................................. 61
  4.3 WOMEN’S RIGHTS VERSUS HUMAN RIGHTS ................. 63
  4.4 THERE ARE ONLY TWO SEXES .......................................... 64
  4.5 WOMEN’S RIGHTS VERSUS A WOMAN’S NATURE ....... 64
  4.6 SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS VERSUS
  “TRADITIONAL RIGHTS” .................................................... 65
  4.7 THE EXECUTIVE POWER OF “GENDER FEMINISM”
  AS A RED RAG .................................................................... 66
5 THE INTERACTION BETWEEN NEGOTIATED MEANING OF SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR ............. 69

5.1 COEXISTING DISCOURSES ...................................................... 69

5.2 FEMALE SUBDISCOURSES OF PRO-RISK [PREMARITAL] SEX ................................................................. 70
5.2.1 The Pragmatic Approach .................................................... 70
5.2.2 The Romantic Illusory Approach ...................................... 71
5.2.3 The Romantic Assertive Approach .................................. 71
5.2.4 The Culturally Assertive Approach ................................. 71
5.2.5 The Realistic and Rational Resigned Approach ............. 72
5.2.6 The Indulgent Resigned Approach ................................. 72

5.3 FEMALE SUBDISCOURSES OF ANTI-RISK-[MARITAL] SEX ........... 73
5.3.1 The Aspirational Approach ............................................. 73
5.3.2 The Cultural Conformity Approach ............................... 73

5.4 IN THE MIND OF THE RISK GIRL ........................................... 75
5.4.1 That I will not give in, hopefully – The Raquel Story........ 75
5.4.2 Sometimes you are not together the whole life
   – The Andrea Story ..................................................... 85
5.4.3 It’s beautiful to be a mother, it’s beautiful to have
   children – The Carmen Story ....................................... 88

5.5 IN THE MIND OF THE POWER GIRL ......................................... 91
5.5.1 I don’t want that for me – The Maria Story .................. 91
5.5.2 My mother always told me to never be dependent
   on a man – The Isabel Story ........................................ 97
5.5.3 My priority now is to study – The Ana Story ............ 104

5.6 THE SEXUAL WORLD OF THE ADOLESCENT MAN ............. 107
5.6.1 Strong Influence of Peers ............................................. 107
5.6.2 Pick a flower…it awarded me esteem as a man
   …I felt fulfilled .......................................................... 108
5.6.3 …if a woman gives in easily, she won’t do ............... 110
5.6.4 …if a woman is liberal…wants to make progress,
   she won’t do ............................................................ 113
5.6.5 CARAS made a difference – The Miguel Story ........ 114
5.6.6 So, when does a man consider the use
   of condoms? ............................................................. 116
5.6.7 A curiosity to know– The Orlando Story .................. 116
6 BASICS OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE EMPOWERMENT ................................................................. 119

6.1 RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AS A HAMPERING CIRCUMSTANCE . 119
6.2 THE UNEVEN DISTRIBUTION OF SEXUAL EDUCATION AS A HAMPERING CIRCUMSTANCE ......................... 121
6.3 PRIMARY SOCIALISATION AS A HAMPERING CIRCUMSTANCE .......................................................... 123
6.4 DETERMINATIVE FACTORS OF GIRL SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE POWER .............................................. 130
6.5 THE PRACTICE OF GIRL SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE POWER .......................................................... 134
6.6 A SCHEMATIC WOMEN’S DISCOURSE-POWER MODEL . 137
6.7 THE ROLE OF THE MASS MEDIA ......................................................... 140
   6.7.1 Competing Discourses.......................................................... 140
   6.7.2 Symbolic Constructions of Alternatives Make a Difference............................................................... 142

7 ADOLESCENT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH EMPOWERMENT IN PRACTICE ................................................................. 145

7.1 CENTRO DE ATENCIÓN Y RECREACIÓN PARA ADOLESCENTES DE SUTIABA (CARAS) ......................... 145
   7.1.1 Background ................................................................. 145
   7.1.2 Vision of CARAS ........................................................... 146
   7.1.3 Mission of CARAS ......................................................... 146
   7.1.4 Objectives of CARAS ...................................................... 146
7.2 CLUB EN CONEXIÓN (CEC) – YOUTH IN ACTION FOR A BETTER FUTURE ................................................. 149
   7.2.1 Objectives of CEC ........................................................... 149
   7.2.2 Background of CEC ......................................................... 150
   7.2.3 Organization, Extension and Activities of CEC ...... 150
   7.2.4 Pedagogy and Educational Content ........................................... 153
   7.2.5 Other educational activities performed by CEC ...... 157
   7.2.6 Club en Conexión from Inside........................................ 157
8 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 THE SOCIO-CULTURAL LOGIC AND SUBJECTIVE RATIONALITY OF SEXUAL RISK-TAKING

8.1.1 The Illogicality of Reproducing the Social Problems We Have the Knowledge to Control

8.1.2 Theoretical Retrospect

8.1.3 The Compelling Constructions of “Common Sense” by Means of Socio-Cultural Reward

8.1.4 Structural Conditions and the Sociology and Psychology of Sexual Risk-Taking

8.1.5 Where There Is Power, There Is Resistance

8.2 UNDERSTANDING THE MECHANISMS OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE EMPOWERMENT

8.2.1 A Study in Interaction between Base and Superstructure

8.2.2 Sexual and Reproductive Rights Are a Matter of Power and Must Be Conquered

8.2.3 The Indispensability of Enlightenment

8.2.4 The Indispensability of an Open Society

8.2.5 Insurrection against the Shame

8.2.6 The Significance of the Right to Abortion as a Reproductive Health Measure

8.2.7 The Impact of Political-Economic Circumstances and Structural Transformation Processes

8.2.8 No Policies are Final

8.2.9 There is No Escape from the Need to Address Structural Determinants

8.2.10 The Power of the Sense of Prospect

8.3 A PLATFORM FOR INTERVENTIONS

8.3.1 Beyond Individual Behavioral Change

8.3.2 Fora for Young Agents in Interaction

8.3.3 Easy Shame-Relieved Access to Knowledge, Networking, Health and Counseling Services

8.3.4 Further Research
9 REFERENCES .................................................................................. 207

10 APPENDIX ................................................................................... 223

10.1 COMMENTS BY EQUIPO MARY BARREA................................. 223
10.2 COMMENTS BY EQUIPO CLELIA GALEANO ......................... 223
10.3 COMMENTS BY FRANCIS MARTINEZ................................. 226
10.4 LA HISTORIA DEL CENTRO DE ATENCIÓN Y
   RECREACIÓN PARA ADOLESCENTES DE SUTIABA ...... 240
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
This study could not have been accomplished without the contribution of a number of different representatives of the Nicaraguan context, representing different insider positions and perspectives on sexual and reproductive rights, health and interventions. Most important are of course my informants, who so openly and confidently have shared their knowledge, and sometimes very painful experiences, with me.

Furthermore, an indispensable contribution of some key-reference persons has been their analytical comments on interview data. The most prominent adolescent sub-culture advisor and commentator since 2005, that is, during the last concluding phase of the project, has been Francis Martinez, whose contribution is salient in the form of commentaries and reflections interspersed in the text.

Her predecessors on the post as adolescent sub-culture advisors, Clelia Galeano, Eleazar Guevara and Verónica Tellez, named in the text as Equipo Clelia Galeano, have contributed in a similar way and organized several data collection events, including in-depth interviews and focus-group gatherings.

Collaborators within Club en Conexión de León (see section 3.3.2; http://www.clubenconexion.com) have been director Silvia Perez and different adolescent members of the club, among them the above presented Francis Martinez, one of the volunteer educators.
Besides all the participating adolescents among the many volunteering functionaries working within Centro de Atención y Recreación para Adolescentes se Sutiaba (CARAS), predominantly physicians and psychologists, considerable collaboration, has been offered to the study by especially director and initiator Dr. Jairo García and, furthermore, Dr. Andrés Herrera, Dr. William Ugarte, Dr. Juan Ruiz and Dr Ronaldo Duarto.

Moreover, throughout the research process I have had the privilege to share some of the comprehensive knowledge possessed by the following veterans within the problem area of this study:

- Mercedes Lara and María del Carmen Flores, representing Mary Barreda, an organization predominantly aiming at protecting and taking care of young girls, victims of sexual exploitation, child labor and prostitution. They occasionally give their comments within the present text as Equipo Mary Barreda.

- Sofía Montenegro (see references), journalist and researcher at Centro de Investigaciones de la Comunicación (CINCO), a well-known authority on, not least, women’s rights and gender issues in Nicaragua.

- Humberto Abaunza and Irela Solorzano (see references), Puntos de Encuentro (http://www.puntos.org.ni), experienced social researchers specialized in youth issues and among the initiators behind several educational programmes working with human and sexual rights in Nicaragua. Especially the awareness-raising programme: Somos Diferentes, Somos Iguales – Una Propuesta para Construir Alianzas entre Jóvenes (Puntos de Encuentro 2001) has aroused well-deserved attention as a successful conveyor of Human Rights consciousness. Nowadays Humberto Abaunza is working within Fundación Desafío.

I am also very grateful for all the support and services I have enjoyed from my Nicaraguan colleagues and friends, among them, Dr Elmer Zelaya, Fundacion Coordinacion de Hermanamientos e Iniciativas de Cooperacion Austríaca (CHICA) and management, administrative and technical staff, researchers and students at The Centre for
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1.2 THE INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The present study, initiated in 1998, derives its point of departure and inspiration from a remarkably successful research and postgraduate education program on Reproductive and Child Health, developed and accomplished by the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health in Umeå in collaboration with the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (UNAN) in León (SAREC/SIDA 1992-02).

This research collaboration program constituted an advanced, and a unique, multidisciplinary, interactive combination of traditional research activities, training of postgraduate students, especially physicians and midwives from Nicaragua, and public health intervention efforts concerned with the problems of reproductive and child health in Nicaragua.

The conducted research has produced a considerable amount of quantitative as well as qualitative data, and, accordingly, structured knowledge on, among other public health problem areas, domestic violence (Ellsberg 2000; Valladares 2005), adolescent pregnancies (Berglund et al, 1997; Zelaya 1999) and infant mortality (Peña 1999).

Since the beginning of the current decade, this research and research training collaboration has entered a new phase through the creation of The Centre for Demographic and Health Research (CIDS) in León (http://www.cids.edu.ni). The main objective has been to
invest gained experiences and competence into a local environment for sustainable research and training at the Master’s level and for postgraduate studies, primarily directed at students from the Central American region in the area of epidemiology and public health.

Thus, the original mother project was principally founded on an epidemiological basis, and did, consequently, not sufficiently emphasize traditional social scientific angles of approach, in particular social constructivist and cultural aspects. There still remained a need for supplementary knowledge regarding the cultural logic and subjective rationality behind adolescent sexual risk-taking behaviour, questions which the present critical realist study largely aims at answering. In other words, the current study is more about trying to understand the mechanisms behind the phenomenon than about the event as such (Danemark et al 1997, p 14). This study, as well as the mother programme, is funded by SIDA/SAREC.

1.3 THE PROBLEM

1.3.1 Complications of Sexual Activity

Unprotected sex increases exposure to sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and unwanted pregnancies that generally imply severe negative health and social consequences. Sexual risk-taking behaviour constitutes a serious problem among the adolescent population in Nicaragua as in most of the world (WHO 1993; Robinson & Rogstad 2002; Wellings et al 2006), including the Nordic countries (Ruuusvaara 1983; Traen 1993; Edgardh 1992, 2001; 2002; Andersson-Ellström et al 1997; Forsberg 2000, 2005). Among other things, unwanted children imply family instability, child abuse and infantile malnutrition (Alvarez et al, 1987). Moreover, in Nicaragua illegal abortions, especially within the poorer sections of the female population, have constituted an important reason behind maternal mortality, as they are often performed under miserable sanitary conditions (Garfield/Williams 1992, p 120).

Adolescent sexual health must remain a top priority globally if any impact is to be made on unwanted pregnancies and the rising prevalence of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (Robinson & Rogstad 2002, p 314).
In descriptive terms, there is considerable international consensus about what kinds of situations, contexts and background variables that contribute to the deprivation of young people regarding power over their lives and thus increase the likelihood of a woman or a teenage girl exposing herself to the risk of, for example, an unplanned pregnancy. Poor economic conditions, disturbed family relations in terms of absent fathers or the presence of stepfathers, and strained communication with the mother, low self-esteem, a basic unsatisfied need of affection, low levels of education, shallow peer relations and a lack of close, trusting, confidential and counselling contacts with adults are some of the factors that, in different combinations, determine the exposure of adolescents to fatal medical and social risks by sexual risk-taking (Berglund et al. 1997; Ruusuvaara 1983; Antwi 1987; Edgardh 1988; Marques/Ebrahim 1991; Jarlbro 1990a-b; Odhner 1991; Linares et al 1992; Luster/Small 1994; Billy et al. 1994).

1.3.2 Subordination and Risk
In other words, you could say that material dependency, a craving for emotional affection and a lack of alternative life opportunities, in combination with culturally sanctioned female subordination to machismo values, in accordance with a prevailing patriarchal value system, make it difficult especially for single and destitute women to venture to demand more than the prospect of at least some sort of physical and material protection possible to derive from a man (Berglund et al. 1993). Unfortunately, this attempt to escape misery far too often proves dysfunctional, and that is one important reason why so many pregnancies turn out to be unwanted. Thus, in the case of adolescents, sexual activity often provides a temporary ease of emotional discomfort, but constitutes, at the same time, a manifestation of extreme dependence rather than independence (White & DeBlassie 1992).

That is probably also why far from all women appreciated neither their first nor their latest intercourse, the way they came about. Only 64% of Swedish young women (14-20 years) think that their sex debut turned out “right” (Forsberg 2000:38). Abma et al. (1998) account for a similar observation exploring the circumstances sur-
rounding young (15-24 years) American (black, white, Latin) women’s first intercourse. No less than one fourth of her sample indicated that they actually did not want to realize, and regretted, their first sexual act, to which they had, initially, more or less given their consent. The fact is that as many as 9% of her respondents, especially the younger women living in complicated domestic situations, stated that their first intercourse was not voluntary at all.

Abma and her colleagues (op cit) display with their study that the less the young woman is keen on having sex, the less control she possesses over the situation and the less likely it is that “the situation” permits the application of contraceptives, which in turn makes the sexual act more hazardous than necessary and desirable, not least because of the relative element of surprise in the involuntary intercourse, which implies a lack of possibilities to plan, to be a step ahead.

In other words the non-subordination of the woman in a relationship correlates positively with the use of preservatives (Jörgensen et al 1980) and consequently impedes sexual risk. Thus, female empowerment constitutes an indispensable element in any strategy or intervention aiming at mastering a situation of unwanted pregnancies and the diffusion of STDs. One fundament of empowerment is spelled “education”.

This line of reasoning is validated by our Nicaraguan quantitative data, where there is a corresponding causal relationship between not being able to finish primary school (up to 5th grade) and becoming pregnant before 17 years of age. Education is without doubt one of the most important bases for accumulating social power, and there are a number of good reasons to assume that the possibility of a young woman to exert influence over her own sexual security increases with the cognitive preparedness and the self-reliance that, for different reasons, can be expected to follow more or less directly from education (Zelaya 1999). In other words, education as a primary product principally constitutes a fundamental counter force to subordination – at least as long as we do not problematize the education concept in terms of its disciplining functions in society.
1.3.3 Poverty and Risk

Material distress definitely constitutes a main cause behind the way many destitute women have to compromise about their knowledge and experiences regarding the venturesome dimensions of sexual interaction. Particularly, the situation of the Nicaraguan woman is a well-documented typical example (see for example Lancaster 1992; Renzi & Agurto 1993; Johansson 1999; Ellsberg 2000; Flores 2004; CODENI). In Nicaragua, where the traditional family structure to a large extent has become disrupted (Collins 1990), women carry the responsibility for maintaining the family in almost 40% of the households, though without self-evident dominion over their life situation (Leví 1993).

Thus, as was established by WHO, as early as in 1950, a strong correlation prevails between the level of economic power and the status of health, as well as the distribution of fatal complications of sexual practices (WHO 1950; Berglund et al. 1994).

Any negative complication of sexual activity among women in Nicaragua is generally associated with destitution (op cit; Linares 1992). They lack access to the traditional bases for accumulating social power (Friedmann 1979, p 101). This means, for example, to be deprived of productive assets, financial resources, social and political organizational support, health and education, etc., that is, deprived of the appropriate knowledge and resources to promote and advance one’s own life chances (Berglund 1982, pp 17 ff).

Consequently, we already know the strong correlation between access to the bases for accumulating social power – such as means of production, financial resources, social and political networks, health and education - and our possibilities to exert power over our sexual lives, inclusive of our bodies and sexual options. However, neither in Nicaragua nor in any other international, social formation, can the variable material deprivation alone completely explain the routes of sexual risk-taking behaviour. Neither national nor individual welfare will in any self-evident way render immunity against either STDs or unwanted pregnancies. Welfare “only” decreases the relative distance to knowledge about alternative routes of action, their
substance and circumstances, and increases the relative access to a greater number of materially feasible options.

Comparative interviews with Swedish and Nicaraguan adolescents who are just about to finish secondary school suggest that young women in Nicaragua, especially the poor, compared with their Swedish peers, possess considerably less freedom of sexual choice. To the less fortunate Nicaraguan adolescent girl there remains on the whole no other choice, that is, no other way to exert power over her own life situation, than to explicitly and consequently say no to sexual relations, since long as she cherishes any kind of aspiration, for example through education, to construct her own material platform for independence. Paradoxically, in this context the traditional rule construct of the Catholic church can all of a sudden function as a progressive force, as its dominating norm system grants legitimacy to the refusal of the girl, and thus makes it easier for the boyfriend to understand and accept her rejection – even though he, in accordance with prevailing male machismo principles, will continue to expose her to la terápia, that is be assiduous in his attentions to her and demand la prueba de amor, that is, her confirmation of her love by giving her consent to sex.

1.3.4 It Is Not Self-Evidently about Lack of Information or Knowledge

Neither knowledge about possible risks involved in sexual encounters, nor familiarity with different contraceptive methods evidently prevents risk-taking in sexual life (Jarlbro 1990; Edgardh 1992, 1999; Berglund 1993; Forsberg 2000). As scrutinized by Langer & Warheit (1992) among others, there is generally a very weak positive correlation between sexual awareness and schooling and sexual behaviour. Thus, sexual education can be successful in imparting formal knowledge as such but without necessarily resulting in preventive behaviours (op cit). That is, determinants of teenage pregnancies are complex, not self-evidently a matter of inadequate awareness and/or a lack of contraceptive counselling services, but also composed of factors such as social values, religious beliefs, unemployment, lack of women’s empowerment and other gender issues.
Of course, there are misconceptions circulating in Nicaragua, too, regarding the pros and cons of different types of contraceptives. Notwithstanding, there is no general ignorance prevailing in Nicaragua concerning the advantages and disadvantages of, for example, the condom. Rather, you could talk about a widespread, culturally and socially accepted, reason that is both incoherent and inconsistent when it comes to sexual conduct in terms of combining sexual arousal with what we have learnt about responsibility and contraceptives. This fragmentary reason is highly unreliable in the real-life sexual encounter. This means that very few men, although aware that they probably should, actually continuously carry through contraceptive precautions. In a representative sample, Zelaya et al (1995) found that one half of the men in the urban areas, and 25% in the rural areas have some experiences of using a condom. However, none was using this contraceptive method regularly, only occasionally, as a situational protection against STD in situations they sized up as, for themselves, especially risky (Zelaya et al 1996). Otherwise, to the guys, in subjective rational terms, using a condom simply means restrained pleasure.

Consequently, traditional sexual education (Haesert 1994) might be functional when it comes to imparting formal knowledge as such but without self-evidently carrying the necessary impetus resulting in preventive patterns of behaviour.

Sexual mechanisms of power and control obviously, except for the essential aspects of resource distribution, also involve other more subtle social, psychological and cultural interacting circumstances that we know very little about. Nevertheless, in administrative, socio-political contexts, sexual risk-taking behaviour is still understood and managed as above all an information or a knowledge problem. From a public health perspective for example, there is, among other things, “concern” that pornography will take over sexual information and convey “erroneous” sexual knowledge (Ådin 2000:4). In a similar way, in most countries, not least in Catholic Nicaragua, traditional, officially sanctioned, deeply rooted common sense prevails, prescribing that most information and messages carrying a sexually related content potentially more or less directly inspire and incite to sexual intercourse.
This kind of concern, i.e. moral panic, can be recognized at all times within most cultural and political contexts, in spite of the lack of any conclusive evidence that exposure to what is considered “erroneous”, compared to “proper”, knowledge, in reality matters at all regarding how predisposed you are to manage your sexual life in a destructive way. In many countries pornography is, and in most countries has some time or other been, banned, without any obvious correlation, at no time before or after, between the existence or non-existence of the prohibition on pornography and early unwanted pregnancies, the diffusion of STDs or the rate of sexual abuse (Kutchinsky 1972; Forsberg 2000).\textsuperscript{1} Hypothetically, it rather seems as if there is reason to consider the possibility that it is within the social formations most tending to prohibition that the youth have the poorest control over their sexual and reproductive lives today, as it can for example be measured in terms of how a lack of control expresses itself statistically in relative numbers of unwanted pregnancies. Denmark legalized pornography in 1967 and Sweden in 1971. Nevertheless, in statistical terms, the situation of adolescents in these countries regarding sexual and reproductive power is considerably more favorable in most respects compared with most other countries in the world. That is, there are other determinants, far more important than media content and the prevalence of eroticism, that constitute the bases for unsafe sex.

1.3.5 Overconfidence in the Power of Mass Media
When it comes to sexual risk-taking behaviour on the whole, a rather routine-like overconfidence prevails in the role of mass media as both destroyer and rescuer of today’s youth. The ideas in Strasburger’s book Adolescents and the Media (1995) represent an ideal type of this variant of blind alleys among public health strategies. This reasoning takes its point of departure from modelling theory, and is, in what concerns the negative impact of media, principally about most of the content in the media today being sexually suggestive, functioning as a manuscript of instruction for sexual conduct. What the youth, according to this approach, are exposed to, via for example

\textsuperscript{1} To understand sexual crimes, prostitution and other negative expressions of sexual practice, as well as racism violence, crime and other social problems, it is necessary to ask overall questions about contemporary society and how it is possible that we continuously reproduce the very conditions we attempt to eradicate. See Berglund/Ljuslinder 1999:175-180.
television and movies, is seldom self-control, contraceptives, abstinence and responsibility, but above all long kisses, extra-marital intercourse, prostitution, incessant sexual allusions at all times, in all genres, and sex as action instead of an expression of tenderness and love. Nevertheless, non-pornographic films are also judged as inappropriate material for people younger than 21 years of age if they contain scenes of tenderness considered as “too” sensual. For the same reason, you must in Norway be at least 15 years old to be allowed to enjoy operas like La Traviata, Cosi fan Tutte, Salome and others. Not even the most extreme movie violence is subjected to this kind of censorship. “Entertainment-love”, is obviously considered to be more “dangerous” and morally devastating than ”entertainment-violence”, so called warnography.

1.3.6 Morality and the Mass Media
What, for some reason, is forgotten in this context, is that the ”proper”, ”good”, traditional morals have never deserted the mass media arena. They co-exist constantly and continuously, as always, with the media content that the moral panic condemns, both as genres and independent programs, like talk shows, documentaries, social coverages and educational productions, but, in particular as reference material, constantly present in most categories of programs where cultural agreements about what is moral or immoral become visible and confirmed as guiding principles every time as they are challenged by border-crossing behaviour.

Instead, according to the followers of moral panic, the positive pedagogic potential of the mass media is about the media content having to be planned, and consequently Strasburger also concludes his crusade against the bad impact of mass media by suggesting how it would be possible, both to render children and youth immune to the harmful effects of media content, and to improve its informative quality. That is indeed desirable. Unfortunately, however, the problems of sexual risk-taking behaviour are more complicated than just a question about replacing the ”wrong” content with the ”right” content in different contexts of information and entertainment.

Cuba constitutes an illustrative example of how complex the links are between cultural, religious, economic, social, political and sexual
common sense and the ways that young people’s sexual practices are actually manifested.

Cuba (Rimby 1997) is facing more or less the same problems as Nicaragua and the rest of the world regarding early, unwanted pregnancies and diffusion of STDs – in spite of (unlike Nicaragua) sexual education being of relatively high quality, not least because the establishment do not attempt to withhold sexual knowledge from the youth; in spite of (like Nicaragua) the moral heritage of the Catholic Church; in spite of (unlike Nicaragua) the strongly supported sociopolitical consensus concerning gender equality; in spite of (unlike Nicaragua) public socialist morals that condemn sexual harassment, abuse of women and irresponsible sex; in spite of (unlike Nicaragua) the relative isolation from global media and in spite of (unlike Nicaragua) the prohibition against pornography.

1.3.7 We know too little about the cultural logic and subjective rationality behind sexual risk-taking behaviour

There are without doubt considerable international efforts put into research about sex, social life and youth culture within several different disciplines. This means that we know quite a lot about sexual behaviour, risk factors and contraceptive use from an epidemiological and medical perspective.

The problem of reproductive health in Nicaragua has, as presented in section 1.2, been approached from an epidemiological perspective by a Nicaraguan-Swedish research collaboration programme on reproductive and child health performed by the Departments of Preventive Medicine, Paediatrics and Gynaecology-Obstetrics at the Medical Faculty of UNAN university in León, Nicaragua and the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at the University of Umeå, Sweden (Project Plans 1993-2000). The outcome of this research displays, regarding sexual risk-taking behaviour, a very complicated pattern of different economic, social, psychological and religious variables interacting with each other (Berglund et al 1994).
Furthermore, there is quite a lot of descriptive data available about sexual conceptions, values and attitudes among adolescents from a social scientific point of view (Pantelides/Cerutti 1992; Pick de Weiss/Vargas-Trujillo 1990; Lewin/Helmius 1983, 1986; Helmius 1990). But as Edgardh (1992, p 114) states in a review of earlier and ongoing research, deficient multidisciplinary collaboration makes this research fragmentary.

Accordingly, epidemiological research (www.umu.se/phmed/epidemi/nicacd) supplies valuable scientific knowledge about reproductive conditions in Nicaragua regarding for example the prevalence, background and general causes of unwanted and adolescent pregnancies. But, even if fortified with qualitative research instruments, traditional epidemiology has not until recently been sufficiently equipped, methodologically, to produce the cultural and social scientific knowledge about determinants of sexual risk-taking behaviour, necessary to pronounce on valid strategies for interventions. We need, for example, to know more about how sexuality is culturally and ideologically rooted in the Nicaraguan society, and this can only be done by means of a thorough exploration of major different sexual discourses, their origin and articulation, through which the Nicaraguans learn about and relate themselves to sex. This, in turn can only be done through an analysis of how sexuality is communicated at different levels of the Nicaraguan society, and between these levels.

We also need to know more about the interaction between biological, social, economic, political, cultural and material factors in different contexts and about what it is that makes a particular behaviour in a particular situation logical or subjectively rational in spite of the latent risks. In other words, we need to know more about both sociological and psychological mechanisms. We know that there is an eternal tension between nature and culture in sexuality and that the basis for sexual desire is a physiological inheritance. However, the way we give expression to our sexuality in terms of with whom, when, where, how and why, is, as we know, socially constructed and to a large extent moulded, even determined, by cultural agreements and conventions, i.e. reason.
But, does this mean that biological factors have come into power when we disregard intuitive warning bells and expose ourselves to sexual risk-taking? Of course, the impact of nature cannot be totally disregarded, but even more important is of course the interplay between different coexisting, simultaneously sometimes also among themselves competing and even conflicting, but nevertheless integrated and mutually rewarding discursive systems of rules, orders of discourse, within the same society and cultural context. This problem is well exemplified by the articulation between the traditional insistence of the Catholic Church on premarital sexual abstinence and the call for sexual freedom among men, in accordance with the coexisting machismo syndrome. Both attitudes are awarded legitimacy and are continuously cherished within, and by way of different knowledge institutions, in the Nicaraguan Society. This is why particular risk-taking behaviour from a particular, ”objective”, point of view can be very hard to understand, while it is altogether logical if interpreted within another sub-cultural, adolescent, context.

Weeks (1986, p 16) has a corresponding discursive approach when he argues that the meanings we give to sexuality are socially organized, sustained by a variety of languages, which seek to tell us what sex is, what it ought to be - and what it could be:

*Existing languages of sex, embedded in moral treatises, laws, educational practices, psychological theories, medical definitions, social rituals, pornographic or romantic fictions, popular music, and common sense assumptions (most of which disagree) set the horizon of the possible. They all present themselves up as true representations of our intimate needs and desires. The difficulty lies in their contradictory appeals in the babels of voices they bring forth (op cit).*

### 1.4 OBJECTIVES

1.4.1 To explore the discursive processes and practices through which young people construct their cognitive and affective basis for sexual activity and preparedness for promoting their own sexual and reproductive health
The main objective of this project is, from a cultural and social scientific perspective, to reveal how sexuality, attitudes to sex, sexual behaviour and its complications, are ideologically and discursively, that is socio-culturally, constructed and reproduced, and possibly economically determined, in Nicaragua. Thus, the overall questions are:

- To what extent does unsafe sex possibly constitute a product of competing discourses in relation to economic factors?
- How, when and why does unsafe sex become logical and, implicitly, “almost” naturalized as socio-cultural common sense?
- How come that you practice premarital sex, though official socio-cultural common sense, the consent of the church and school, instruct you to safeguard your big gift, your virginity, for your future spouse?
- Why don’t you, as you are morally taught, in accordance with official common sense, protect yourself and your partner from unplanned pregnancy and the risk of STD?

An important task in this context is to scrutinize the, apparently in some way reciprocally rewarding, coexistence and articulation of among themselves semantically conflicting discourses in the Nicaraguan society. One such example is the somewhat strange interaction and interdependence between, on the one hand, the traditional Catholic, hetero-normative, core value which urges premarital sexual abstinence and, on the other hand, the deeply rooted socio-cultural practice of machismo, also based on hetero-normative values, which urges sexual freedom for men. As we go along, we will attempt to answer, among others, the following questions:

- Who says, why, where, how and when, that sexual pleasure is primarily a privilege for men?
- How has this notion developed and how is it reproduced, and by what means, in what contexts?
- Why does subjection constitute the dominant meaning of female sexuality and how does that influence women’s power over their reproductive health?
- How is this common sense challenged by meanings that favour the woman’s power over her own body?
• What are the sites and expressions of this struggle for meaning?

One step towards this kind of understanding consists in the study of some of the most important knowledge institutions in Nicaragua, thus revealing some of these sites and accordingly the discourses and their backgrounds in which different meanings of sexuality are being cherished and naturalized (compare Fiske 1990, p 164 ff). In this way, it is possible to explore the ideas and activities related to sexual life as they are enacted in the everyday activities of school, the mass media, religious institutions, foreign and domestic non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and ministries.

In other words, to understand why attitudes and habits favouring unsafe sex prevail contemporaneously with widespread knowledge about the threat it constitutes to the future of young women and men, it is important to study how sexuality is signified, represented and diffused. This means, among other things, that we need to learn more about the role different societal institutions possibly perform in the reproduction and consolidation of – in terms of public, reproductive, health, dysfunctional behavioural patterns, and the possible contribution of these institutions to the promotion, and/or obstruction of change.

• What kinds of campaigns, or regular educational activities concerning health, sexual behaviour and AIDS have been performed, or are being performed, by what kind of institutions or other social actors in what contexts, under what circumstances, with what effects?
• What kind of knowledge has been, or is being, diffused, how, in terms of verbal and visual codes, and with what objectives and results, in terms of changed attitudes and behaviour?
• What kind of meanings are being produced or reproduced towards what kind of public consent?

Among other institutions that, in this context, ought to be studied in Nicaragua are:
• The Ministry of Health (MINSA)
• The Ministry of Education (MED)
• The Catholic Church
• Mass media
• NGOs working with women’s rights and reproductive health

1.4.2 To explore what there is to learn from ongoing empowerment activities
This objective constitutes the prolongation of the efforts introduced above. By accomplishing the objective above we will also be able to identify at least some features of the contribution of different communication efforts to the strengthening of cognitive and practical capacity among adolescents to conquer a command of their reproductive health. In this study I have in this matter especially focused on a couple of selected, politically and religiously fairly unattached, NGOs as “ideal types” to represent the many different kinds of national and international organizations, institutions, clinics, etc working with the promotion of women’s rights, reproductive health and adolescent social problems.

• What is the contribution of these expressions of popular reply, to the lack of public commitment to the urgent issues of both public and reproductive health in Nicaragua, to their target populations regarding their possibilities to exercise influence over their own sexual and reproductive lives?
• To what extent, how and why do conveyed meanings support or challenge dominant ideological conceptions concerning sexual matters?

1.4.3 To indicate a platform for interventions towards empowerment
A very important requirement and responsibility for “good” public health research lies in its obligation and ability to feed gained experiences back into the system as change-stimulating energy in the service of the human rights of the investigated population, in order to enable them to exert influence and control over their own health situation.

Principally, there are two main procedures, separately and in combination, through which this requirement can be obtained. On the one
hand, it can be done through methodological measures built into the research process, as for example is the case with the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach (see chapter 3). On the other hand, it is also important to make obtained knowledge easily accessible in different ways to different interest groups, scientifically as well as in popularized forms, depending on the objective.

1.5 ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

Above, I have particularly introduced the background, the starting points, and the objectives of the current research project. I have argued that in spite of the fact that we internationally, in medical and epidemiological terms, know so much about sexual risk-taking behaviour and its consequences, we need to learn more about the socio-culturally determined processes, to fully be able to motivate the realization of certain protective and healing actions. However, the crucial point is, basically, about the consequences caused by the ever present conflict between work and capital and the resulting unequal distribution of power, that is, the continuous/constant production and reproduction of poverty and different kinds of deprivation in progress within broad masses of the population in both poor and rich countries.

In chapter 2, I briefly establish and discuss the theoretical basis and conceptual framework of the study. As already revealed in the title of the report, the study primarily applies a socio-cultural constructionist approach although equally emphasizing the determinative power of political-economic and structural conditions.

Chapter 3 depicts the methodological strategy and the general idea behind the organization of the research process. In addition to revealing my epistemological reasoning, I account for modes of procedure regarding data collection and analysis. The ideals of Participatory Action Research (PAR) constitute the leading principle behind how the project was originally designed, although the current study eventually could not be carried out as an orthodox PAR-event.

In the chapters 4-7 I account for, analyze, interpret and discuss my empirical bases.
Chapter 4 presents the major competing poles of views on sexuality, reproductive health and women’s rights within the Nicaraguan society. We can probably assume that this account is largely representative of most religiously dominated cultural contexts. These poles are represented by, on the one hand, the dominating religious and patriarchal, value system and by the radical, globally rooted, feminist movement on the other. Reproductive rights and health, in the end, appears to be principally, and to the higher degree about women’s rights. That is, the problem, besides different variations of poverty, is gender inequality, embedded in rigid, traditional, patriarchal and religious structures.

Chapter 5 constitutes an essential element, not to say the most important building stone, in the report, as it structures the way different stored cultural constructions, in the minds of adolescents, rub against one another, and are negotiated, and how these discursive apprehensions are linked to certain levels and faces of power and thus to a certain level of sexual risk-taking behaviour.

In chapter 6, I make an inventory and examine the major basic, interacting counters of sexual and reproductive empowerment in Nicaragua. I attempt to structure the most important protective as well as risk-generating determinants.

Chapter 7 constitutes an account of the work, policies and strategies of some organizations working with sexual and reproductive empowerment.

Finally, in chapter 8, I summarize the contribution of this study to the extended knowledge about how sexual risk-taking behaviour is socially and culturally constructed and what there is to learn from ongoing empowerment activities. Moreover, on the basis of this conclusive information I design a platform, or maybe, better expressed, a plan for action, for how to promote sexual and reproductive empowerment.
2 THEORETICAL FRAMING

It is by means of communication, through different knowledge institutions, that normality and reason in a society are produced, culturally manifested and ideologically reproduced, but also constantly challenged and subjected to change.

It is through communication that culture is constructed, i.e. evolves. Culture in this context corresponds to shared meanings, mutually agreed upon, within a certain social formation. Values and norms, as well as concepts like normality and reason, are accordingly created by means of language.

Hence, it is also through communication that man both creates culture and is moulded by it. Culture both constitutes and expresses life patterns during specific historical, social and material circumstances. Accordingly, we have to approach, understand and study the individual as a social object who both participates in the construction of, and is constructed by, different systems of meaning production.

That is, neither certain attitudes to sex and sexual behaviour, in all their different expressions (Foucault 2002; Caplan 1995; Jacobson-Widding 2002; Johannisson 2002; Lewin 2002; compare Weeks 1981; 1986), nor gender (Gustavsson 2001), can be understood outside the historical, social, economic, political and cultural contextual circumstances of a society.
Thus, the different ways sexuality expresses itself within a certain social formation is a social expression of culture (Turner 1990, p 12; White 1987, p 163). To understand the roots of a certain sexual behaviour – how people develop their knowledge, attitudes and positions in relation to sex – we need, among other things, to study the cultural artefacts by which sexuality is signified in different systems of representation.

The mass media constitute such a system by the means of which we obtain the building material through which we learn about, “understand” and construct the world. This is also one of the most classic research questions: What meanings, how and why, with what effects, are the media contributing to? In interaction with other systems of meaning production, such as for example the school and the church, that is, social and educational institutions for naturalized, systemic knowledge and control, the mass media offer a considerable variation of overlapping but also alternative, manners to cultivate everyday reason.

The cultural superstructure of a society presupposes and offers models, which contribute to common tracks for interpretation of conventional understanding. Such models, or matrixes, are the basis for the narratives of the mass media and belong to the most important contribution, of for, example television to cultural reproduction.

Nevertheless, people in Nicaragua, as in the rest of the world, manage their sexuality in many different ways, as we are all, at the same time, members of a variety of different and among themselves both mutually reinforcing and competing meaning systems stored in our culture. There are a great number of different discursive communities which we are members of at the same time.

The meanings you can derive and internalize as common sense are thus determined by the range of your access to alternative meaning systems and your ability to structure incoming stimuli and orient yourself within this disorder of different kinds of knowledge. In other words, the basis of your way to manage your sexual life is constituted by an assortment of different simulations of the world, mixed
with the socio-economic, cultural, political and religious context in which you receive, live and interpret your reality.

It is obvious that the general picture of the practice of making love combines competing attitudes to relationships and sex. It seems accepted as common sense for the man to practise premarital sex and to be rich in extra-marital relations through life, while it is not formally taught. This is, on the other hand, absolutely not acceptable in the case of the woman, though it is commonly known that participation in the premarital love game is rather widespread among the female population, too, even if mostly for different reasons than for the men.

While a diversified sex life implies important status for the man and proof of this manhood, the same, sometimes unsafe, behaviour performed by the woman is shameful and indirectly makes her a prostitute if judged from a traditional point of view. Anthropological data remind us that, in most cultural settings, men’s human value is largely linked to their proved potency, while for women reproduction still constitutes a strong incentive for sexual relations. Among both men and women breeding ability to a considerable extent decides their value as human beings (Jacobson-Widding 2002, pp 154-155).

In other words, culture regulates human conduct but is not static; it embraces tensions and contradictions in the form of competing discursive bodies. Hence, the meaning and practice of sexuality are subjected to a never-ending struggle for the power over the conceptual contents of body, gender, sexuality and sexual common sense.

Accordingly, to be able to explain the cultural logic and subjective rationality behind sexual risk-taking behaviour and how it is possible to become your own enemy in sexual practice, I derive much of my conceptual means from the social constructionist paradigm (Burr 2003; Barlebo Wenneberg 2000), as it allows us to study how discourses on sexuality and sexual behaviour are not “about” sexuality and sexual behaviour, but actively produce and actually constitute sexuality and sexual behaviour (Foucault 2002; Caplan 1987/1995; Hall 1997, pp 5-6; Fahlgen 1999 pp 12 ff; Winther Jorgensen & Phillips 2000).
Through a social constructionist perspective the concept of sexuality widens...to the explanation of sexuality as a social, cultural and historic construction where every society constructs an ‘adequate’ and rewarding sexuality (Lundgren & Sörensdotter 2004, pp 16 ff).

In interaction with family, peer groups, church, school, media and other socialization agents you learn, from a particular, more or less “invisible”, point of view, silently present in its absence, what is permitted/forbidden; good/bad; natural/unnatural; right/wrong; normal/abnormal; sinful/not sinful; we/them; etc. Thus, it is through language, as an expression of the prevailing order, that we develop our thinking and mould culture (Hall 1997). Nothing is known as sexual until it is represented and given meaning as sexual common sense in the form of knowledge. This is also why knowledge implies power, according to the classical thinking of Foucault, as a particular way of representing something produces a particular form of knowledge, which, if repeated over time, becomes normative and, taken for granted, truth as cultural agreement, and thus less visible as an ideological construction.

The hostility to pleasure and body that is taken for granted as a decree from God in prevalent moral theology, illustrates how constructed belief, through its structuralization into a body of knowledge, becomes power that can determine the conditions for women’s power over their bodies and sexual and reproductive lives for centuries. Ranke-Heinemann (1990) has studied this issue.

The biblical foundations of this ethical system are extremely feeble, [...] ...What moral theology wants to be...is something it has had basically to work out on its own. [...] The Church remedied this gap [lack of complete, systematic ethics qualifying for the Kingdom] in Jesus’ preaching by completing, systematizing, and concretizing his moral theology, (p 325).

In other words, as also taught by Althusser (1976), we become our own oppressors, as we can’t escape ideology but are constituted as subjects and only imagine that we are freely acting individuals, when our understanding of the world and our actions are actually determined by predominant structures. In the structural Neo-Marxist
theoretical thinking of Althusser, the mass media, educational institutions, the family, and other components of the social superstructure, constitute the ideological state apparatuses through which we are exposed to, and internalize, the particular knowledge, points of view, of the political, economic and religious elite, and accordingly develop an imaginary relation to real life which undermines our possibilities to influence our destinies in any decisive way. From a Foucauldian point of view maybe this process, benevolently, could be named “discursive co-optation”, as ‘disciplinary power’ is understood as an effect of discourse and most effective when it is productive, when it produces [normative, naturalizing] knowledge (Burr 2003, p 69, see also op cit, pp 72 ff).

Foucault’s great contribution is that he has shown how the desire for power and control in society dresses in the language for truth, rationality and knowledge. And it is this language that Foucault calls discourse. There is no innocent discourse (Beronius 1989, p 70).

This form of power is so efficient because people enter into the process willingly. It is therefore based on the assumption that people don’t recognize that they are being controlled, believing their self-monitoring and surveillance to be their own choice and for their own good (Burr, op cit, p 79).

Unlike Althusser, however, who sees no way out of the reproduction of inequality secured by the superstructure, Foucault, besides being opposed to the Marxist notion of intentional power exerted by the propertied elite, emphasizes the ever-present resistance. Where there is knowledge there is power, and where there is power there is also resistance based on alternative knowledge. Prevailing discourses are constantly being challenged by competing discourses offering alternative truth effects. We can hopefully utilize the power, coming, made available, through the competing discourses in our struggle for change in our lives.

Any version of an event brings with it the potential for social practices, for acting in one way rather than another, and for marginalizing alternative ways of acting (Burr op cit, p 68).
This possibility of resistance is described by Danemark and his sociologist colleagues (1997, p 110) in terms of entering another structure. That, even if we ... ‘always’ exist in structures...are structurally situated independently of our will... this does not mean that we are unable to change our situation. In other words, there is an interesting resemblance in the way the concepts of ‘discourse’ and ‘structure’ are used in different analytical contexts.

Nevertheless, there is apparently also a structural logic to consider, and hence also a need for critical political-economic theory. Material, structural conditions do constitute a crucial explanatory factor. This does not mean that we yield to economic determinism but rather acknowledge that mode of production, politics and ideology, that is, economic base and superstructure, are related and form institutions and norms that frame the actions of social agents. This notion of how structures lay down conditions for consciousness and action, although partly contested by social constructionist theory, is thoroughly explored through the history of social sciences and not particularly controversial. Danemark et al (1997, pp 92 ff) elucidate in a comprehensive way the relationship between social structures and human action. Thus:

The influences of structures work by forming situations that human beings find themselves living in – as structures precede every single person. The structures that we are born into and the cultures we inherit situate us structurally in society: the structures exert their influence upon us whether we want it or not and without our help (op cit, p 109).

However, the influence and effects of structures over our lives are mediated through human action and interaction. The social structure lays down the conditions, in terms of possibilities and limitations, for the actions of the social agents who interact within the framework of these conditions, which in turn result in the reproduction or transformation/elaboration of the structure in a cyclic process (op cit, p 102). This approach, suggesting the duality of structure and agency, is elaborated in Gidden’s (1984) “theory of structuration” and elucidated by Johansson (1995, p 106):
Structures do not exist separate from individuals. They always constitute the medium as well as the result of social action.

As Mosco (1996, p 212) points out, however, this is also a fundamental thought in Marx’s work: people make history, but not under conditions of their own making.

What then, is the contribution of social constructionist, structuration and critical political-economic theory to the understanding and control of sexual risk-taking behavior?

In his exposition of the concept of political economy, Mosco (op cit, p 22), conveniently in view of the current account, opens with the following quotation from Garnham (1979, p 129):

*In order to understand the structure of our culture, its production, consumption and reproduction and the role of the mass media in that process, we need to confront some of the central questions of political economy in general.*

And in general, political economy is about the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources (Mosco op cit, p 25).

Thus, a critical political-economic perspective conceptually takes its point of departure in social class. In other words, those structural, political-economic, conditions that regulate the distribution of the bases for accumulating social power, lay the conditions, and to a considerable extent determine, the range of possibilities and limitations for different population layers to take advantage of the latent public good theoretically available within the Nicaraguan as well as the global society. But in practice this is available only to citizens able to pay for, for example, nutritious food, quality education and health care, etc. An economic structure that allows unbridled market forces to pursue the ideas of neo-liberal utopia seems to promote widening gaps between rich and poor, and thus also an enlarged manpower reserve which in turn means the production of
families with a lack of sufficient income and resources to sufficiently meet the needs required to give their children what they need to claim basic human rights in terms of, among other things, health and education, that is, the different kinds of capital in the words of Bourdieu (1986: see Swartz 1997 pp 65 ff, for a comprehensive, well-structured, account) that they need to be able to exert influence over their own lives. Limited basic schooling limits access to higher education. Nor do emotionally and intellectually poor home conditions, in terms of, not least, parents and adults, for various reasons often absent, for various reasons unable to provide the basic needs of love and affection, and favor the development of empowered adolescents.

Moreover, as already announced above, political economic structures, structures of ownership and control of the media and the operation of other knowledge institutions and media market forces, determine to a considerable extent the ideological content and the diffusion, production and reproduction of cultural consensus in a society (Garnham 1990; Curran & Gurevitch 1991; Philo & Miller 2001; Manning 2001). Power produces power in all its different forms and expressions in mutual reinforcement.

This relation between the cultural superstructure and the economic base has been studied by British Cultural Studies since Richard Hoggart formed the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964. In general terms, the objective has been to bring understanding to the manufacture of social consent by culture and its relation to economic and political structures. From this point of view, if from any, mass media cannot be considered as neutral observers and reporters of reality but as powerful institutions involved in the ideological reproduction of contemporary social relations in which their own power is invested. In this work, besides the ideas of Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) ‘hegemony’ constitutes a key concept.

Consequently, we are back where we started in this chapter concerning the need to be aware that so called “normal” ways to look upon and act towards sexual issues are culturally constructed and expressions of power which affects the possibilities of adolescents,
not only in Nicaragua, but in the whole world, to get a fair chance to take care of their own sexual and reproductive business in a way that promotes their possibilities to stay healthy and not become parents until they voluntarily choose to take that route. Furthermore, behind the cultural storing of certain constructed, naturalized meanings of how you are expected to deal with your sexuality, there are, hardly visible, political and economic structures laying down the conditions for this social production of manufactured consent. As pointed out in the work of Bourdieu, inequality is reproduced both culturally and economically. Culture, becomes the sphere within which class, gender, race and other fields of inequalities are naturalized and represented in forms that obscure the relationship between these inequalities and economic and political inequalities and both their economic and political primary causes, not as a conscious, cunning plan worked out by the economic power elite, but precisely for that reason much more ingenious, as social inequities and inequality become generally accepted as a completely natural phenomenon.

This theoretical fundament is important if we are to understand some of the reasons behind why some adolescents more than others end up with the undesirable consequences of sexual risk-behavior. There is both a structural and cultural logic and subjective rationality involved, but these are unfortunately mostly not consciously mastered by the adolescents themselves.

As social anthropologist Caplan (1987/1995, p 25) expresses her view on the connection between sexuality and culture:

*What people want, and what they do, in any society, is to a large extent what they are made to want, and allowed to do.*

In the present study, a step towards the fulfillment of its objectives depends on the answer to these questions: What are the Nicaraguan adolescents made to want and what are they allowed to do in their sexual and reproductive lives?

Unfortunately, there is no evident, secure cause or formula, ordained by God or Nature, for what is the only right thing to do. Instead
there are power tensions and different kinds of constructed knowledge structured in discourses. Whatever the adolescents do, they are part both of the reproduction of prevailing structures - embedded in the discourses they are producing about themselves, through which they give meaning to and understand their ongoing everyday lives (Fahlgren 1999, p 16) – and of the feeding of oppositional discourses and thus change. Because:

Sexuality is not once and for all given, but a product of negotiation, struggle and human activity (Bergenheim & Lennerhed 1997, p 13).

Thus, structural conditions influence what there actually is to learn through, and in interaction with, family, peers, the media, the church and educational institutions, etc, about life and its conditions and what is desirable, permitted and possible, as well as the range of alternative views and our ability to materially, mentally and educationally, relate to and act towards the supply of knowledge and cultural agreements within the society in which we live our lives. We do not, as hinted above, necessarily learn what we really want or what is “best” for us. This, however, does not mean that we, with varying eagerness and success, are not striving for “functional” guidance.

On the basis of our everyday reality of prevailing conditions, socioeconomic background factors, and embedded individual resources, we all do what we can, are made to want and allowed to do, in accordance with Caplan’s quotation above, to give meaning to our existence. Our special set of individual, social and cultural experiences and qualifications contribute to the way we create and define ourselves through the meaning we produce, maintain and rearrange in our interaction with different faces of our culture. An important, classic, debate in this context has concerned our freedom and possibilities to read, interpret, and understand cultural texts and media messages differently from the preferred reading built into them. In other words, to what extent is it really possible to talk about an autonomy of the receiver in relation to the power of messages distributed from above, for example through mass media (Jensen/Rosengren 1990; Curran 1990; Hall 1986; Fiske 1987; Allen 1987)?
As discussed in this chapter, our “freedom” is illusory and correlates with the range of access to oppositional discourses and alternative knowledge. Nevertheless, we want to know how mass media and other institutions in interaction with the Nicaraguan adolescent public, within different socio-cultural environments, contribute to the production, reproduction and change of sexual common sense.

But meaning is, as suggested above, ambiguous and its expressions can take an infinite number of patterns, depending on, among other things, in which inter-textual context the message appears and the social context in which the message is received. It is thus convenient to talk about fields or networks of meaning and a lot of the meaning we generate is generated on a subconscious level. Our task is to scrutinize these dynamics and to localize their determinants.

Simultaneously, structural conditions are eventually influenced by social interaction and ongoing knowledge processes among the collective of social agents (see Danemark et al, 1997, pp 92 ff).

Social interaction leads to change, which the present study aims at learning more about. All ongoing knowledge production outside and within every individual, organization and institution, is a part of a continuously ongoing socio-cultural change/development process regarding the way to understand and relate to sexuality and reproductive rights.
3 DESIGN AND ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Unfortunately, the current report does not, mainly for economic and logistic reasons, have access to all the empiric data ideally needed to cover all the components described in the original project design, among them the task to scrutinize meaning production, concerning sexual and reproductive matters, on every level of the communication process from different producers and communicators of messages to receiving groups and individuals on different levels. There are, for example, data concerning the contents and determinants of sexual health information efforts in Nicaragua and their role in discursive competition processes that ought to be supplemented in future research efforts (see section 1.4.1, p 26).

Nevertheless, both for the purpose of contextualization and as a contribution to the epistemological problem of knowledge production and social change, I think it is important to account for, and problematize, the thinking behind the original research design as such, as well as the prioritizations performed along the research process, and that is what I am going to do in some of the sections below. We need to intensify the discussion about, for example: What is, or what should the role of research really be in relation to the need for change regarding a fair global distribution of social welfare, considering not least the relation between power and knowledge? Moreover, what constitutes methodologically practicable and rewarding ways to study relations between the construction and communication of “knowledge”, and the reproduction of power relations, impoverishment and inequity in health? Above all, what can we do about it?
3.1 THE CONTRIBUTION OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

3.1.1 Content and Discourse Analysis

When the current project was initially designed it was rather mechanically anticipated that a study aiming at examining the cultivation, reproduction and construction of hegemonic discourse would need at least, on the one hand, an inventory of past and contemporary intentions, productions and accomplishments among official institutions as well as among non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and, on the other hand, thorough scrutiny of the Nicaraguan media.

Regarding the Ministry of Health and the NGOs, this implied the searching for, and the selection and systematization of, campaign plans, strategies and information material concerning reproductive and sexual health, before and during the present government.

Likewise, to reveal the role of the mass media, it appeared necessary to collect material from different genres, to understand how the meaning of sexuality was encoded in informative and educational contexts as well as in entertainment, drama, fiction and the news. The supply and contents of erotic literature, love poetry and pure pornography was also something to be considered.

In other words, by way of introduction, it seemed comparatively reasonable to realize a traditional content and reception analysis of messages mediated through the media and other institutions described above (Moore 1990; Morley 1980; 1986; Allen 1989).

Accordingly, concrete messages, an assortment of representative texts, i.e. cultural artefacts, in the shape of, for example, articles, TV-shows, posters, booklets, commercials, advertisements, speeches and schoolbooks, and their reception, were planned to be scrutinized in depth through different means of qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews with a diversified sample of receiving sub-populations, in order to understand what kind of meanings were negotiated and what kind of cognitive, affective and behavioural effects that eventually could be traced (Jensen/Jankowski 1991; Vestergaard/Schroeder 1989).
In practice, this component implied a highly advanced collection of not least written and visual material on different levels of Nicaraguan symbolic meaning production and has, for self-explanatory reasons, only partly been possible to carry out.

Another source of informal, subtle data planned to be approached by qualitative measures was the composition of active and latent discursive structures in the minds of the policymakers, the designers, the authors, the producers and the journalists who perform a gate-keeper role, and who to a large extent decide what is actually diffused to the Nicaraguan audience. What are really the cognitive and ideological bases of their attitudes and activities with regard to sexual matters?

Thus, by means of content analysis, in-depth interviews, focus-group meetings and participatory observation, the ingenious intention was to map the mental models, concerning sexuality and society, of, at one end, a sample of public planners and designers of informative, educational and persuasive messages, and receiving adolescents at the other end.

The ambition was to understand the relations between the attitudes, the knowledge and the values of the policy-makers, program-planners and producers, their way to formulate the abstract objects of communication among themselves and the way these meanings were informally communicated among peers and colleagues and through the actual designs they employed when they encoded the message by arranging visual and verbal signs and symbols into certain patterns and structures.

The value of this effort was to study if, and to what extent, civic information - possibly, already in its coding phase, before intended target groups were exposed to concrete messages through campaigns and/or media - was impregnated with certain, that the message producers were unconscious of, discursive “preferred meanings” (Curran 1990, p 152).
Public program-planners, campaign and information officers, as well as journalists, are themselves interacting subjects of the culture whose conception conventions they are applying in their message designs. This means that they are not necessarily aware of the extent to which there might be ideological or discursive discrepancies between what they want to mediate and the meanings they actually produce or reproduce as subjects of a certain field of common sense. If that would be the case, it could contribute to the understanding of the continuous reproduction of traditional patriarchal values that counteract the establishment of change processes, even in national contexts where progressive forces are present and in possession of a certain scope of action within the government.

3.1.2 Reception Analysis
When this project was originally designed, I was devoted to the ultimate detection of manifest and latent meanings of sexuality in the Nicaraguan society and the way they are/were commonly encoded, expressed, diffused, received and decoded. An examination of planned contents was to be enriched by an analysis of the way selected representative artefacts were received, interpreted and communicated among a sample of adolescents with different backgrounds. Among other efforts this also implied an evaluation of the persuasive power of certain materials.

The reception analysis was supposed to be carried through by means of in-depth and focus-group interviews in connection with showings, where these representatives of the target population were exposed to relevant articles, booklets, TV-shows, religious, poetic and educational texts, etc., and the heading of the report would be: “The Interaction between Negotiated Meaning of Sexuality and Sexual Behaviour among Adolescents in Nicaragua – A Reception Analysis”. In the present report I do have something to recount regarding negotiated meaning and behavior (chapter 5), but it is not the result of a true reception analysis.

The problem, however, with the kind of data achieved by this kind of analysis is that it is impossible to fix the effect of a certain media text on a receiver, i.e. its meaning and its consequences. We can fairly
accurately comment on the contents of individual meaning production on a certain, separate occasion, that is, isolated cases of cognitive reconstruction of the meaning of a certain text (Berglund/Ljuslinder 1999, pp 52-53). But, we cannot know for sure what it is that causes what kind of cognitive and/or affective mark, in what way, in the mind of the receiver, with what effects, and in what context. This, in turn, implies consequences for our possibilities to study cultural and social meaning production (Seaman 1992, p 304).

Logically, in consideration of this discussion, and, if the main task is to bring understanding to how sexual risk-taking behaviour is socially and culturally constructed, it must be what is in the minds of the adolescents in relation to their practices that makes the difference. So, maybe, in the current project context, there is no real need for an analysis of neither contents nor its producers and diffusers. Why, then, bother to carry through a reception analysis?

3.1.3 From Traditional Communication Research to Cultural Analysis

Accordingly, as time went by, and considering the shortage of resources, it appeared as more useful to concentrate on the decoding and construction processes. This adjustment of priorities on the way derived its logic from the notion that irrespective of what is symbolically diffused, it is the meaning actually present in the mind of the receiving individuals that determines their actions and what is logic and what is rational.

This problem also constitutes the main issue of the project. Thus, when it comes to the question: “What kind of knowledge has been diffused how” (see section 1.4), this report, as evident in chapter 4, confines itself, above all, to capturing the most salient features of major competing discursive poles in the Nicaraguan Society.

In other words, this project constitutes, above all, a study of the ways meanings of sexuality are produced and communicated among adolescents, their peers and related adults, and thus, how sexual and reproductive thinking and practices, as a function of everyday discourses, are socially and culturally constructed.
Thus, the research accounted for in this report has primarily focused on the discourses of sexuality as they are communicated at school, at home, at parties, on the beach, etc. To a large extent, this work has consisted of an attempt to enrich the more traditional qualitative instruments, such as participatory observation, in-depth and focus-group interviews with the ideals of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach (Whyte 1989; 1991a, b; Fals Borda 1987; Swedner 1981; Hall 1975; Lewin 1948). On the whole, an important objective of the research work has been to examine the usefulness and applicability of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a strategy to combine the production of knowledge with the stimulation of change. How can research contribute to empowerment and change?

3.2 THE CONTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH TO EMPOWERMENT AND CHANGE

3.2.1 What is Participatory Action Research?
The theory, practice and application of participatory action research (PAR) is really nothing more than the most recent phase in a continuous evolution within the area of applied social research, and thus also a relatively new sprout on the branch of qualitative methodology. On the one hand, PAR is to be considered as an effective way to acquire data on sensitive topics and, on the other hand, PAR is a way to bridge the common gap between the knowledge production process in itself and the application of the understanding obtained in change policies.

This approach to applied science is not a particularly new idea. Kurt Lewin introduced action research (AR), i.e. purposeful research towards change, as a scientific concept as early as 1948, and — though sometimes still somewhat disputed — the research strategy as such is solidly based on a rather long tradition of epistemological thinking by, among others, celebrated philosophers like Imre Lakatos and Paul Feyerabend. Yet it was not until the end of the 1970s that action research became an important, and within the prevailing paradigm a more widely accepted, tool for socially concerned researchers. Paulo Freire’s well-known pedagogy of liberation from 1972 was truly epoch-making. Harald Swedner (1979), probably
the most important early spokesman for AR in Sweden, even viewed this approach as a new paradigm for the production of knowledge.

The action researcher does not belong to the audience but stands among the actors on the stage. The action researcher produces knowledge which can be employed to push the course of events forward, and he participates himself in this process. The production of knowledge - the research - is an integrated part of the efforts to implement goals which have been formulated in collaboration with those whom the researcher allies himself with in this work for change (p 9).

One important driving force behind the evolution of this new paradigm was a growing dissatisfaction among researchers engaged in social problems, poverty, education, etc, maybe especially among those who were working in developing countries. Their frustration arose to a large extent from the shortcomings of traditional quantitative methodology when it came to explaining social injustice and suggesting corrective measures (Abrahamsson/Swedner 1979; Berglund 1982).

In their work with Bhoomi Sena, a peasant movement in Maharashtra, India, de Silva et al (p 3 ff) considered conventional social science to be unable to obtain the perceptions of those people whose life and struggle were being researched. Instead they employed an approach which they, on a more elementary level, called dialogical research, in which the external researcher internalises himself, to stimulate uninhibited responses, reminiscences and reflections. In this process, the accumulated experience from the life and struggle of the peasants, and their considerations of options and rationales for action, are revealed. The next step, which they designated as participatory research, is when this dialogue is enriched by the conscious intellectual input of the people themselves, whose lives are being researched (op cit). The basis of this unorthodox methodological move is their notion that intellectual maturity has very little to do with formal education and training. This approach is to a considerable extent applied during my work together with Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC)\(^2\) in Colombia (Berglund 1982).

\(^2\) Regional Council of Indigenous People in Cauca
Whyte (1991b, pp 2 ff) experienced this feeling as early as 1936 during his first field study, accounted for in his well-known book “Street Corner Society” (Whyte 1943), when he discovered the value of the active input of ideas from some of his informants regarding their own social world. Still, it took Whyte more or less fifty years to take the scientific consequences of his doubts about the academic point in separating between research and its practical applications.

In the same spirit, Hall (1975) has settled his account with the survey research approach. The most important contribution of his article to our understanding of why research methodology must be flexible and continuously border-crossing is his statement about the ideological implications of any methodological approach. Actually, this conclusion is not really controversial from an ontological point of view, but it nevertheless deserves to be repeated over and over again, as the myth of the objectivity of science in general and certain methods in particular is still impeding the employment of more daring and thus maybe more exploratory and rewarding, methodological approaches, at least when it comes to the contribution of research leading to change. Especially public health research should of course be of direct benefit to people; the problem is how to make obtained knowledge accessible to the target population and applicable in their efforts to influence their living conditions.

This issue is elucidated by Whyte (1991b, pp 271 ff), who, in his definition of applied social research, distinguishes between three different approaches:

1. The professional expert model, in which the researcher makes a study and recommends a course of action to the decision makers.

2. Action research controlled by the researcher, in which the researcher aims to be a principal agent of change.

3. Participatory action research (PAR), in which the researcher seeks to involve some members of the organization studied as active participants in all stages of the research/action process.
The advantage of the participatory approach is that research and change become a simultaneous process. Increased insight and understanding imply change, and change generates knowledge. Through participation in the discovery process the involved target population becomes more able to articulate problems, initiate processes and find solutions (Hall, p 29).

From a methodological point of view, close interaction with those most familiar with the experience superfluous of everyday deprivation must be an aim in itself. If we accept the notion of truth as something relative, which is common sense in cognitive psychology and communication theory today, the target population should not be deprived of their possibilities to contribute actively to the production of knowledge and to be part of the control of the process. This control is, however, traditionally and without further reflections, appropriated by those who, by definition and levels of training, are outside the experiences within which change is sought (Hall, p 27).

To be poor means to depend on others for defining how one is to live (Friedmann 1979, p 111).

This dilemma is also touched upon by Fals-Borda (1987):

...science is a cultural product with specific human purposes and implicitly carries those class biases and values which scientists hold as a group. It therefore favours those who produce and control it... (p 337)

What we need, unprivileged social groups as well as established socially concerned scientists in any society, is, consequently, access to tools which allow us to produce and systematise knowledge which increases the possibilities of the grass-root groups to gain wider access to the bases for accumulating social power. In this context PAR constitutes an experiential methodology and a step towards a people’s science as theorized by Fals-Borda (op cit), and one pathway toward intellectual revitalization, as Whyte (op cit, p 287) sees it.
What makes PAR effective both as a research and as a change instrument is apparently its ability to bring the academic world closer to the world of practice (see Whyte op cit), that is, combine and integrate academic knowledge with popular wisdom. Fals-Borda (p 332) describes this in terms of how external and internal animators contribute with their own specific techniques and experiences, knowledge derived from different class conformations and rationalities, to a truer picture of the reality we want to transform.

This dialectical tension in praxis leads to the rejection of the asymmetry implied in the subject/object relationship, which characterises traditional academic research and most tasks of daily life (op cit).

Participatory theory, according to Fals-Borda, implies that such a relationship between external and internal animators must be replaced by a subject/subject one and thus a demystification of research.

Thus, however, PAR is not only a research approach but also encompasses aspects of adult education and implicitly often political action. This does not mean that PAR discards the need to accumulate and systematise knowledge, but the approach still challenges more established academic routines, which of course in itself, therefore, is the best argument for its merits as a complementary scientific tool.

The point with PAR is, accordingly, to reduce the distance between knowledge, action and change.

But the theoretical advantages of PAR also imply its practical problems. The flexibility and hermeneutical elasticity of PAR, i.e. the lack of definite rules for how to conduct its implementation make it necessary to tailor a special design for each single research case. For example, how do we put PAR into practice in the case of neonatal deaths at HEODRA on the one hand and in the case of teenage pregnancies on the other?

3.2.2 Reducing the distance between knowledge and action

The connecting thought of this reasoning is that research and change are parts of a simultaneous process, in which increased insight and
understanding lead to change and subsequently to the generation of new knowledge and so forth. Through participation in the discovery process, the target population becomes more able to articulate problems, initiate change processes and find solutions. Research through planned collaboration between researchers and actors, the so-called informants in the traditional sense, thus become something more than just enhanced knowledge about states of things and contexts. It reduces the distance between knowledge and action, that is, between awareness and change. Inherent in the PAR-approach are the means of continuous back-feeding of gained experiences into the system, as change-stimulating energy in the service of the human right of the target population to exert influence over and control their own health situation.

Traditionally, in development contexts the target population in mainstream research is first of all approached as passive informants, from whom “raw material” is to be extracted for processing by a skilled scientist. Eventually, as time goes on, obtained knowledge and understanding will be, more or less indirectly, diffused to the grass roots, for example in the form of instructions by means of public communication campaigns.

This way to stimulate change and development has not proved very effective when it comes to rapid and sustainable improvements of poor people’s living conditions. Rather, the passive attitude to the relationship between scientific activities and change may indirectly contribute to legitimatizing, and thus maintaining prevailing oppressive patterns of social relations.

Instead, it is important to find ways to activate, open up space, create communicative infrastructure, and make it practically possible for the people concerned to involve themselves, emotionally as well as cognitively and practically, in the research process both as active informants and as interpreters and conscious users of produced knowledge. They may thus become active change agents in their domestic environments on the basis of their own formulated needs and preferences, that is, the problem orientation of the local community. This means that it is important in this type of research to desert
the old idea of respondents as disposable objects and instead con-ceive of them as the thinking, rational, struggling subjects they are.

3.3 FROM AN ATTEMPT AT PARTICIPATORY ACTION RE-
SEARCH TO A TRADITIONAL QUALITATIVE APPROACH

3.3.1 Snowball Strategy
Early in the research process, a group of teenagers was organized in Leon. These persons were supposed to become our main body of informants and representatives of the youth together with whom we would explore their sexual world, idiosyncrasies and life conditions, as well as that of their friends, for at least three years. The groups should to some extent be mixed, in the sense of being composed of individuals from different socio-economic strata, to ensure the representation of different perspectives and a possibility to study, on the one hand, the relationship between socio-economic background and sexual attitudes and behaviour, and, on the other hand, the way in which possibly different idiosyncrasies and practices communi-cate. Furthermore, the parents, grandparents, neighbours, partners and friends would, step by step, also become part of the study popu-lation, as a natural part of a snowball strategy. In this way the study would be able not only to deal with existing problems concerned with sexual attitudes and behaviour and their preconditions in a retrospective way, but also to follow the cultural sequences and discursive patterns through which the unfavourable preconditions for an unwanted pregnancy or a STD develop in a certain social and economic environment. Due to a lack of funding, this effective way of studying discursive processes unfortunately could not be com-pletely taken advantage of. A lack of time and resources limited the possibility to supervise, monitor, and document a possible positive impact of the project on a wider community of adolescents more or less concerned by the project.

3.3.2 Longitudinal study
In 1998, another group of adolescent informants, of different ages, with different social and educational backgrounds, were organi-zed to form the avant-garde of the Participatory Action Research Approach. These teenagers were to be active collaborators in the research activities from the further development of the problem
formulation, through the performance of data collection and the content and reception analysis to the final presentation of the findings. Accordingly, this group was supposed to function as a reference group, in collaboration with which it would be possible to realize pilot studies and to discuss, above all, validity matters. Moreover, in accordance with the principles of PAR, the intention was also that these adolescents should serve as important mediators of motivation for change among their peers. Simultaneously with the organizing of this group of teenagers, the informal data collection process was initiated, and thus, among other things, the examination of the way adolescents communicate sex and reproduction interpersonally among each other and with adjoining adults.

This endeavour was quite successful. But as informants grew older and had to take care of their own life projects, the study informally, as time went by, integrated supplementary informants and research collaborators, and eventually the study covered a time-span of almost 10 years of a continuity of interpreting, and mutually validating, dialogues with young key informants, independently representing different consecutive generations of adolescents. Actually, considering the work within the mother programme (see section 1.2), since 1992, on the background of adolescent pregnancies (Berglund et al., 1994; 1997), this means that the results displayed in this report are firmly based on interview data and observational experiences gained during 15 years.

3.3.3 Collaborating Organizations

Besides a solid base of representatives of the Nicaraguan youth integrated in the project, from the very beginning of the elaboration of the project design the intention has been to cooperate with NGOs and other organizational bodies experienced in work aiming at sexual and reproductive empowerment of young people. The pioneering efforts of NGOs, international and national popular organizations working with youth, women’s rights, domestic violence and reproductive health constitute the fundament of change, and their experiences, combined with indispensable wisdom of the youth themselves, are self-evidently of absolute importance as building stones for our understanding of how to construct strategies of sexual empowerment.
Organizations and institutions worth mentioning in this context are, among others, in random order:

- Centro de Adolescentes Bertha Calderón
- Si Mujer
- Católicas por Del Derecho a Decidir (CDD)
- Colectivo de Mujeres 8 de Marzo
- Cantera
- Centro de Mujeres Xóchitl Acatl
- Centro de Atención y Recreación para Adolescentes de Sutiaba (CARAS)
- Club en Conexión de León
- Red de mujeres contra la violencia
- Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses “Luisa Amanda Espinoza” (AMNLAE)
- Movimiento de Mujeres Trabajadores y Desempleadas “Maria Elena Cuadra”
- Mary Barreda
- Puntos de Encuentro
- Centro de Mujeres IXCHEN
- Comité Nacional Feminista
- Centro de Información y Servicio de Asesoría en Salud (CISAS)
- Movimiento Comunal
- Red de Jovenes Nicaragüenses – Por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos
- Federación Coordinadora Nicaragüense de ONGs que trabajan con la niñez y la adolescencia (CODENI)

The basic idea was to commission these organizations to document, structure, analyze and evaluate their strategic thinking and the outcome of their work regarding the sexual and reproductive empowerment of the young people they were working with. That is, by means of their own reflective writing, an important component in this project would have been their expert opinion and unique experiences regarding the empowerment of youth and women. The main question was, and still is: “what do they perceive as successful approaches to promote adolescents’ possibilities to exert power over their own sexual and reproductive lives, and what do they know about what roads not to take?“ That is, what could be learnt from
each other’s mistakes? The contribution of each one of the organizations was supposed to be accounted for and published in this report, which in that case would have been an anthology.

Once again, for economic and logistic reasons, this objective could not be satisfactorily achieved. Instead, as accounted for in chapter 7, **Centro de Atención y Recreación para Adolescentes de Sutiaba (CARAS)** and **Club en Conexión de León**, will represent these actors on the arena of youth empowerment and are thus distributors of knowledge and alternative and oppositional discourses regarding reproductive health in Nicaragua. The collaboration with these two organizations has facilitated the collection of extremely essential experiences, including primary access to informants, as well as secondary data.

The content and meaning of this material needed to be analyzed, towards an understanding of the selection and constitution of competing discourses regarding sexuality and reproduction in the Nicaraguan society.

In spite of certain deviations from the original project design, this study has gained far-reaching experiences regarding the way teenagers produce meanings on sexual matters and how their cognitive simulations of the world are related to their sexual practice.

In an ideal project context, in terms of funding and collaboration with an anticipated PAR-group, these experiences ought to be made directly accessible for immediate realization of interventions. One such presumable intervention, an adolescent health unit, should ideally have been initiated already in the beginning of the project to allow proper monitoring and a final evaluation of its possible contributions to more favourable preventive health care conditions for adolescents. However, in the present situation, the study has at least to some extent taken advantage of already launched interventions, such as CARES, where medical attention and psychological counselling are offered. Thus, the overview knowledge produced by the present study will still be valuable in the planning of future services.
4 MAJOR COMPETING DISCOURSES OF SEXUALITY, REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS – RELIGIOUS VERSUS RADICAL FEMINIST FORCES

4.1 THE SEXUAL EDUCATION BATTLE

As touched upon above, this study is aimed not least at exploring, describing and analysing the discourses through which sexuality, its driving forces and complications, are approached, understood and communicated, on the one hand within and through important knowledge institutions, and, on the other hand, among adolescents and related adults.

To a large extent the work is about identifying the contents of the discursive struggle between the hegemonic truth-regime of the Catholic Church, on the one hand, and different main sources of alternative, oppositional reason, on the other. On the social practice level the conflict expresses itself in terms of quite different ways to understanding sexual education, family planning, abortions, homosexuality and “the nature of women” (see Sowle Cahill 1996 for a thorough exposition).

Hoogland (2005) displays this discursive struggle excellently in her study of antagonistic ways of apprehending abortions, sexual education and gender equality in Nicaraguan everyday life and politics. Alternative, oppositional views regarding the status and contents of
Sexual education was first proposed in the 1980s and 1990s, often in preparatory works (see for example Ellsberg 1991) and in proposed bills (MECD, May 2003) without final formal, official success, as the distribution of the first published "Manual of Sexual Education" from May 2003 was discontinued, and, in December 2003, replaced by a "guide for the education of affection and sexuality", which brought official sexual education back to Catholic mainstream consensus.

The arena of competing consensus of sex, gender and reproduction in Nicaragua is also perfectly captured by Haesert (1994) in her study on the contents and determinants of sexual education in Nicaragua. Haesert carried out interviews with teachers and students concerning sexual education, the purpose of grasping the contribution of secondary school to the cognitive framework and attitudes regarding sex among adolescents. The experiences accounted for in her study reveal that the contents of sexual education in the Nicaraguan secondary school do not relate to, and are not functionally adapted to, the reality in which the students are living their everyday lives. This dissonance between theoretical consent and the reason of everyday life even makes the subject relatively irrelevant to the students as well as the teachers. Currently, 10 years after Haesert's study, this situation seems to be slowly loosening up. For example, Club Conexión has been allowed to realize parts of their sexual education curriculum at several Catholic secondary schools.

Some of the concepts in the culture of the teenagers that determine their sexual behaviour, such as machismo, marianismo3 and virginity, have thus been explored. These concepts explain the ambiguity shown in the way sexuality is communicated. What remains to be investigated, however, is how the national curriculum in matters of sexuality is implemented for the teachers, in order to understand why they teach one thing, in accordance with the Gospel (MINSA, MINSAMED 1995), and commonly believe in another, for example the right of the woman to master her own body, and in matters of reproductive rights.

Currently, 10 years after Haesert's study, this situation seems to be slowly loosening up. For example, Club Conexión has been allowed to realize parts of their sexual education curriculum at several Catholic secondary schools.

3 Predominantly corresponding to feminine passivity and spiritual and sexual purity = the kind of wife, 'Maria', the man wants to raise his children.
4.2 THE CATHOLIC HEGEMONY CHALLENGED – A PROFOUND CRISIS OF THE TRUTH

However, even if Catholic ideas about, for example, the nature of the sexes, premarital sex, contraceptives and abortions still appear to rule, it is no longer as self-evident and easy to establish unambiguously the hegemonic discourse of sexuality in Nicaragua.

The value hegemony of the Church is evidently challenged by the contents of, foremost, the global media and international as well as national NGOs, but to a large extent also by parts of the national media. Moreover, there seem to be some signs of breaches, at least currents, within the Nicaraguan Government, regarding for example the politics of contraceptives, that make it a little harder to equate the policies of the state and the ideological world of the Church.

Is the Nicaraguan State by its means of legislation, campaigns and educational policies ideologically approaching the world of mainstream Global Media and its reproductive health NGOs? One decisive reason for this question derives its logic from the reaction of the Church (Secretaría General de la Conferencia Episcopal 2003) to the proposed bill regarding “Equality of Rights and Opportunities” - *Ley de Igualdad de Derechos y Oportunidades* (Asamblea Nacional 2003) - that was composed by representatives of the women’s rights movement, *Comité Nacional Feminista*⁴, predominantly *Instituto Nicaragüense de la Mujer* (INIM)⁵. The bill is proposed by the National Assembly. The bishops call it “a profound crisis of the truth”.

*Faced with this situation, we, the bishops would like to contribute these observations to prevent notorious confusions as well as pernicious ones. The confusion is part of an epoch of crisis – according to the apposite words of Juan Pablo II “it manifests itself above all as a profound crisis of the truth” [Carta a las familias, 2.11. 1994 n. 13] (Secretaría General 2003, p 1).*

However, the fact that the original bill in the end, as a law agreed by the Congress, has been modified and in principle altogether adapted

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⁴ Feminist National Committee
⁵ Institute of the Nicaraguan Woman
in accordance with the view of the Bishops’ conference and more or less entirely emptied of its political tools for women’s empowerment, suggests that the hegemony of the Catholic Church and its alliance with the political establishment in Nicaragua is not really seriously threatened. The total ban on abortions which was passed on October 26th, 2006, confirms this assumption. Nicaragua has nowadays one of the roughest abortion laws in the world. A woman going through an abortion, as well as the doctor performing the operation, both run the risk of approximately 8 years of imprisonment. Obviously, we need to study how the dominant Catholic discourse interacts with alternative value systems.

In the present account I am letting the dialogue, or rather the conflict, between the proposed bill and the way it was commented on by the bishops, and, in the end, ratified by the Nicaraguan Government, illustrate the longstanding and ongoing struggle between different cultural reasons regarding sexuality and gender in Nicaragua. The hegemony of the church has been challenged more and more intensely over the years by the contents of global mass media and by educational efforts and interventions accomplished by among others NGOs and women’s organizations. Thus, oppositional ideas, concerning, among other things, equality of opportunity appear to catch up with everyday practices step by step.

It is important to recognize, however, that the thinking of the dominating Church is not static but also in a state of continuous, although very slow, change. Especially, it is relatively easy to detect traces of a less rigid thinking, that is, a more tolerant attitude – especially on the grass root level – towards, for example, sexual education and the use of contraceptives. When it comes to the understanding of abortions, homosexuality and gender, however, the positions are still quite locked. The bishops are reacting against a bill that in their eyes is nothing more than covert subversive feminist politics: ...NGOs extremely biased towards the gender feminism that do not represent the thinking and desires of the majority of the Nicaraguan women (op cit, p 9) which symbolically paves the way for social and reproductive practices that are not compatible with the holy truth.
4.3 WOMEN’S RIGHTS VERSUS HUMAN RIGHTS

To begin with, the bishops oppose the change of the name of the law from “Law of equality of opportunities” to “Law of equality of rights and opportunities”. According to them, the proposed bill does not define what “rights” really stand for and, accordingly, does not self-evidently correspond to what traditionally is included in the human rights concept as formulated in the UN declaration of human rights or conventions ratified by Nicaragua. Thus, the Church appears to fear that this kind of alternative writing might open up paths leading to the legalization of for example abortions and homosexuality. The ideological point of departure of the Church in this matter is that the protection of women’s rights is already included in, that is, the same as, the protection of human rights.

The human rights are inherent in human beings through the dignity specific to the human race and not by being part of a determined sexual, ethnic, political group... Moreover, there is a surplus of literature of international organizations and our own NGOs in Nicaragua that inform us about what they consider as “Women’s rights”: the right to abortion and to exercise any sexual orientation, among others (op cit, p 2).

Accordingly, the formulation: access to equality of opportunities in correspondence with needs (article 16:1) becomes an ambiguous language and quite provocative to the bishops, who mean that: “equal access to educational opportunities within all areas” is enough to safeguard the equality of rights between men and women (ibid).

While, on the one hand, seeking support in UN documents to prove the sufficiency of the so-called traditional human rights as a platform for safeguarding women’s rights, the bishops’ conference does not in any way appreciate the work concerning women’s rights performed by the UN through, for example, its conferences. In fact, they find it most inappropriate that the bill in point refers to action plans deriving from the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna 1993, and the IV Women’s World Conference in Beijing 1995.
This is not convenient, as the UN Conferences during the decade of 1990 were highly controversial due to their radical feminist ideology and ambiguous contents. It is convenient that the UN Conferences that do not have any legal connection shall be included in the Nicaraguan laws. The circumstances of the so-called “consensus” of the international conferences of the UN that were realized during the last decade were not democratic, nor were the member nations given equal opportunity neither in its elaboration nor in the participation (op cit, p 4).

4.4 THERE ARE ONLY TWO SEXES
The critical point in their standpoint has its ideological roots in the scientifically enhanced and problematized meaning of gender. It is apparently more or less impossible from a traditional religious point of view to accept what the bishops call the separation between gender and sex, as, for example, expressed in article 16:5 of the bill, which they think is both curious and dangerous (op cit, p 3). There are simply only two sexes, the female and the male gender, which the bishop conference wants to be clearly spelled out in the law. Otherwise, the field will be left open to: the interpretation of certain ideologies that promote the “equality” of any sexual option (op cit, p 4).

4.5 WOMEN’S RIGHTS VERSUS THE WOMAN’S NATURE
Consequently, there is a significant difference between “rights” and “traditional rights”, and, according to the bishops, the radical women’s rights groups promote so-called “rights” that are against a woman’s nature.

…we do not know which these “women’s rights to equality” are (Arto 23) and for sure we know that the radical groups of feminism promote some supposed “rights” that most of all are against the nature of the woman (op cit, p 3).

As far as the bishops are concerned, the Nicaraguan people are not familiar with the contents of the gender perspective and for that reason one should not approve a law without popular knowledge.

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6 la separación de género del sexo
7 la interpretación de ciertas ideologías que promueven la “igualdad” de cualquier opción sexual

64
of the issue, especially as the definition of gender in this law alleges certain “realities” that are inappropriate per definition.

The ideology of gender is highly dangerous as it does not consider the natural law and looks upon gender, the attraction between the sexes, the marriage between man and woman and the natural family as social constructions (op cit, p 9).

4.6 SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS VERSUS “TRADITIONAL RIGHTS”

Therefore, the bishops want to eliminate the word “rights” as long as it does not refer to the traditional rights, because:

“Sexual rights” and “reproductive rights” signify in the UN language the inclusion of the abortion and the promotion of any “sexual orientation” (op cit, p 3).

Thus, according to the bishops, it must be clearly stated in the law that reproductive and sexual health does not include either provoked abortion or the promotion of homosexuality:

Arto. 6. The definitions of reproductive health as well as reproductive rights, ought to specify the fact that they do not include either the provoked abortion or the homosexuality. We have information that the homosexuality is promoted within this terminology in the training of health workers (op cit, p 5).

Evidently the most conspicuous concern is about provoked abortion and “promotion of homosexuality”.

Accordingly, to the bishops, sexual rights constitute: the right of a man to unite with a woman, free from coercion, discrimination and violence, to form a family (ibid).

At no moment it will be understood as the right to provoked abortion or the promotion of homosexuality or other “sexual options” (ibid).
Furthermore, in the same way, to the bishops, reproductive rights constitute the right of the couple, a man together with a woman, to freely and responsibly decide the number of children, the space and interval between these and the access to complete, reliable, objective and scientific information regarding family planning methods (ibid), which, however:

...in no case it includes the provoked abortion or the promotion of homosexuality (ibid).

Thus, except for the provoked abortion, it seems as if the Catholic Church is ready to accept, and is more or less explicitly prepared to allow, the use of any means of family planning methods among married couples. Nevertheless, the bishops want to eliminate sections in the law that urge the promotion of public sexual education, as there is no consensus about what sexual education should be about.

What is definite is that [sexual education] ought to include the parents of the family and promote abstinence before marriage and fidelity within the monogamous matrimony between a man and a woman. This is the truly responsible (op cit, p 7).

On the whole, the bishops’ conference argues that the wording concerning women’s health rights has in a disproportionate manner concerned “the sexual”, as if the woman is only exposed to illnesses related to her reproductive organs. They also criticize the fact that the law does not claim any special protection of the mother. Still, with reference to the fact that rights do not belong to groups, but are inherent in the human person, they think it is also wrong to talk especially about the rights of indigenous populations (op cit, p 8).

4.7 THE EXECUTIVE POWER OF “GENDER FEMINISM” AS A RED RAG

Obviously, the many years of women’s rights struggle in Nicaragua are yielding results regarding political influence, and apparently the male dominated Catholic Church is quite preoccupied with the perceived power of the women’s organizations and the way feminist
standpoints have been substantiated by “El Instituto Nicaragüense de La Mujer (INIM), in the form of the present bill proposal. Article 23 belongs to the most challenging and trying strokes, as it leaves INIM in charge of the “supervision, evaluation, monitoring and counselling of the national institutions responsible for the accomplishment of the equality of opportunities policy”.

...especially alarming is Artículo 23 that also involves “organizations compromised with the equal rights of the women” (op cit, p 6).

As far as the bishops are concerned, INIM has, regarding women’s issues, exclusively consulted and paid attention to the viewpoints of radical feminist NGOs, approaches which the bishops do not consider representative of the aspirations of the majority of the Nicaraguan Women, who are in favour of “harmonious relations with their partner”.

This law does, for example, not talk about mechanism to achieve the major economic obligation of the man for the well-being of the family (ibid).

On the whole, the bishops are distressed about the executive power handed over to the women’s organizations through INIM, as, for example, stated in Article 94, in the above addressed law, which explicitly spells out that the directorship of the “national policy of equality of opportunities” is to be carried by INIM.

The dominance afforded the women’s organizations entrusted to realize this law is disturbing. The outcome of some of these groups has been highly alarming to the different Churches and the general public. Surely they do not possess the great prestige among the population to make them responsible without there having been any voting or them having to explain themselves to anyone. One thing is the government that is popularly elected and must explain itself and another thing is the women’s NGOs. It is fearful to think about the dominance that these groups of women have in an Autonomous Super Being as INIM (op cit, p 8).
Maybe correctly, in its comments on the law, the bishop conference calls into question the representativity of INIM, an organisation which they consider as representative only of radical women’s NGOs, permeated by “gender feminism”, while article 100 prescribes representation from other national organizations.

*It would be interesting to know if this includes groups from the church, as, in the bill proposal of civil participation, the groups of the parties and the Church are excluded from participation…which is discriminatory* (op cit, p 9).

In other words, although it seems obvious that the Catholic Church and the adherent value system enjoy ideological hegemony concerning the understanding of gender and the theory and practice of sexuality and reproduction, the bishops still feel threatened and complain that their political and religious base organizations are excluded and not fairly represented in the work, although they represent “the reason and will of the majority of the Nicaraguan women”. This statement suggests that it would perhaps be possible to measure the balance of power between major antagonistic discourses in a society through traditional public opinion polls. In fact, we don’t really know if the prevalent political system and reproductive health policies, particularly their accomplishments in practice, reflect the reason and will of the majority of Nicaraguan women. In the name of democracy, it would for several reasons be very interesting to know. Irrespective of the result, the statistical answer would open up a number of thrilling, researchable, discourse-analytical issues.
5 THE INTERACTION BETWEEN NEGOTIATED MEANING OF SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

5.1 COEXISTING DISCOURSES
In one way or another, “all” discourses related to sex and relationships are represented in the minds of each and every one of my interviewees, although symbolically appearing in different patterns and combinations in terms of, for example, degree of dominance of a particular discourse. Some are just slender traces and hardly noticeable, while others are like Bigfoot’s footprints. In some cases the sole ruler of the informant’s life is the conviction that the only alternative at hand is to, on the whole, do without sex, while romantic escape fantasies are allowed more decisive power in the life stories of other persons.

The difference in performance and strength of different discourses is closely interlinked with the power position of the individual, that is, determined by the kind of power-structural context, economically, socially, culturally and religiously, within which these discourses have been received, interpreted and symbolically reconstructed and stored, in other words, symbolically reproduced and sub-culturally adapted and adopted. That is why interventional activities and educational efforts, health information and counselling services by NGOs, popular organizations and international aid projects like CARAS, Club Conexión, Mary Barreda, Puntos de Encuentro, Si
Mujer, CISAS, Movimiento Comunal and Movimiento de Mujeres Trabajadores y Desempleadas "Maria Elena Cuadra", among many others, constitute such a considerable empowermental force regarding the sex lives of Nicaraguan adolescents, by means of their input of actual as well as symbolic representations of alternative opportunities.

5.2 FEMALE SUBDISCOURSES OF PRO-RISK [PREMARITAL] SEX

There are several different approaches through which young Nicaraguan girls subjectively give rational meaning to their possible exposure to hazardous sex. As indicated several times in the text above and below, the initiation of sex correlates with a vast battery of variables. Recurrent themes are, however, curiosity, family problems, and search for love and affection, which run through most stories.

The lack of affection is one of the factors that make adolescents become pregnant, because they feel that they will have someone that is theirs, a child that they will love and tender. On the other hand also to reaffirm yourself as woman and mother (10.1:1)

5.2.1 The Pragmatic Approach

Pure curiosity constitutes a reason as good and common as any, especially in a socio-cultural context where sexual matters are very hush-hush about. As is commonly known, most adolescents believe that he/she is almost the only one that has not “done it”, and it becomes even more urgent to take the step when “it” is hidden away and when it is difficult to get acquainted with the untouchable without directly touching it. This risk-producing reasoning has its rationality in the simple, well-known psychological rule that, “if you take something away, or try to hide it, people want more of it”. Accordingly, to sum up, their line of reasoning goes:

- Eventually, I ought to try premarital sex…

1) in order to know what it is all about;
2) because everyone else does;
3) para disfrutar el mejor momento.

8 to enjoy the best moment
5.2.2 The Romantic Illusory Approach
This attitude constitutes maybe the most common trap for romantic female adolescents. How easy is it not to yield to the myth of the one and only saving togetherness and to the appeal of the boyfriend to manifest your love by surrendering to sex? The line of reasoning goes:

- If I give him \textit{la prueba de amor}\textsuperscript{9} he will stay with me in a committed life-long relationship and we will marry and be a family (Berglund et al 1997, p 3, 10; Olsson 1996, p 8; Berganza et al 1989).

5.2.3 The Romantic Assertive Approach
This approach, to a large extent coinciding with the culturally assertive approach below, is dominant among young women who explicitly, without hesitation, refrain from using contraceptives because they want to consolidate and seal their relation by means of a child. They are bored or for some other reason want/need to break loose from their domestic subordination as a child, regardless of the impending risk of landing in an even worse situation of dependence and subordination. They might even manifest resistance when the man suggests using contraceptives, asking:

- \textit{Why don’t you want to have a child with me} (Olsson 1996, p 10)?

There are also informants who explicitly express:

- \textit{Quiero salir embarazada!}\textsuperscript{10}

5.2.4 The Culturally Assertive Approach
For most women in Nicaragua, self-fulfilment as a woman and a mother is very important, often more important than economic independence and equal life opportunities. Consequently, in the dominant cultural context of Nicaragua it is indeed important to know for yourself, and to show the world, that you can become pregnant.

\textsuperscript{9} evidence of love

\textsuperscript{10} I want to become pregnant!
Accordingly, many young women are really curious about whether they are good enough as females, which indeed makes it culturally logic that contraceptives are less "urgent" before having the first child. Thus, quite a few of my young pregnant interviewees do state that they wanted to become pregnant.

- *Imagine if I cannot have a child...I was scared and my husband said to me - For sure you are sterile, and I did not like when he said that to me* (ibid).

5.2.5 The Realistic and Rational Resigned Approach

Reality for a lot of women in Nicaragua is material deprivation and a lack of alternative opportunities. In line with resignation, getting pregnant is a strategy to at least do something, at least do what you can, with your life, in spite of poor circumstances:

- *If I have sex with him I might get pregnant but I do not care, as I then at least will have a child, which is better than not having anything.*

Besides, sex for procreation is more acceptable than sex for pleasure (Berglund op cit, p 3; Pick de Weiss et al 1991). Moreover, in this way I have also proved myself a real woman, a mother:

- *A child is important in life, to enjoy life and from that very same day not think of any man or any romance, only of the child, not to end up corrupt or as a slag* (Olsson 1996, p 9).

- And who knows, maybe he will stay with me.

5.2.6 The Indulgent Resigned Approach

Another, even deeper, kind of resignation is when you really do not care that much anymore. Life is about being *a la orden*[^11], hoping that your stake will reasonably pay off in terms of at least decent treatment.

- *Contraceptives have a lot of side effects... and they do not function very well, you can’t trust them.*

[^11]: be at service
- Men cannot be without sex for a long time and therefore it’s hard to resist the urge... (op cit, p 8).

- I must please my man, otherwise he will leave me (op cit, p 11).

- You can also be raped (ibid).

5.3 FEMALE SUBDISCOURSES OF ANTI-RISK-[MARITAL] SEX

5.3.1 The Aspirational Approach
This protective attitude towards sexual relations can be given life by the following constructed answer:

- I must protect myself from unwanted pregnancy as well as STDs, not risking my education and the possibilities of economic independence inherent in a professional career.

5.3.2 The Cultural Conformity Approach
Another way to avoid unwanted consequences of sexual relations is to conform to established cultural agreements and religious rules and preferably stay a virgin, keep the sello de garantía\textsuperscript{12}, until the marriage, and thus enjoy the rewards of social and cultural conformity, such as:

1. not risking being thrown out on the street by my family;
2. not risking an almost guaranteed future status as a mother and wife, that is, going for becoming a real, true “senora” and thus fulfilling maybe the most important cultural requirements for becoming accepted as a “normal” woman. One decisive reason for that is:

...la mujer que no es virgen casi no tiene oportunidad...\textsuperscript{13}

My interviews with younger men confirm that even for “modern and liberal” men, it can be quite frustrating not being, sexually, the first man in a woman’s life. Thus, virginity is not an indispensable

\textsuperscript{12} guarantee certificate

\textsuperscript{13} ...the woman who is not a virgin is almost without possibilities
condition, but all informants state clearly that they would prefer their future wife to be a virgin.

Here in Nicaragua, a woman who is a virgin when she marries has a better chance of almost no violence...but if she does not marry when still a virgin she will always be framed by us, the men, that I am not the first in your life. [Informant sings:] “No fui el primero en tu vida…”\textsuperscript{14}

To the woman it is a matter of two faces of punishment, because both staying in a destructive relationship and breaking up from it imply bad treatment. As two young male friends conclude:

...to her it's difficult...if she was a virgin...if he was her first...then it becomes difficult for her to stop being with him because she will become dependent...because if she leaves and ends up in the arms of another man...possibly, in 90%, that man will not treat her well...because of the same culture...the machismo. It's a taboo that has come to be generated generation after generation.

Once again the major part of the explanation is to be derived from the fact that to the woman it is a choice between two evils, two different faces of dependence, and, in both cases, bad compromises, which is the classical dilemma of the poor young woman, deprived of necessary social and economic resources and other power factors. Accordingly, the virginity problem, like access to education, is above all a face of impoverishment.

As introduced above, these perspectives are to a higher or lesser extent, in one form or another, represented in the mind of each and every one of all my informants. In other words, the totality of the Nicaraguan culture is represented in each and every one of its constituent parts/individuals. In each case, however, this totality is represented in a unique pattern, whose contours are above all determined by the informant’s possession of different power factors. Accordingly, it is comparatively easy to distinguish between major categories within which we can sort out different attitudes, depen-

\textsuperscript{14} “I was not the first in your life...”
ding on the degree of dominance of a certain way in which an inform-
mant apprehends her future sexual life, and "fate expectancies".

5.4 IN THE MIND OF THE RISK GIRL
The archetype of this category of young women is, as mentioned
above, thoroughly described in Berglund et al (1997). In short, she
is almost inevitably predisposed to premarital sex and early preg-
nancy. This applies even if the pregnancy is not, in accordance with
the rational-resigned approach above, always unwanted for self-
explanatory reasons. This fate of hers is also symbolically matured,
fixed and preformulated in her mind relatively early in her life, in the
form of combined pro-risk/premarital life strategies. The aspiratio-
nal approach is practically non-existent in her thinking, as if partly
wiped out - if ever present.

5.4.1 That I will not give in, hopefully\textsuperscript{15} – The Raquel Story
5.4.1.1 But she did
Raquel, 19 years old, has got no plans regarding education, profes-
sion or career except trying to obtain a secondary/high school certi-
ficate. As she became pregnant, she had to leave her ordinary class
and continue at evening school. She does not think that there will be
any problem getting a job, especially in terms of selling something.
Her boyfriend left her when she got pregnant.

\begin{quote}
Because he wanted to go on somewhere else...he had other ideas,
other perspectives. He wanted to study...he did not yet want to
become a papa.
\end{quote}

They were going steady and he had met both her parents, with whom
she has good contact although they are divorced. No plans to marry
were discussed. They had sex for the first time after four months
together, and after that occasionally in the house of his family, with
their consent. As Raquel was told by her boyfriend, his parents fol-
lowed up with admonitory conversations with their son:

\begin{quote}
...they said to him that he should not play with me, nor leave
me...or as it turned out now, with a belly.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15} Que no cayera, pues
This situation is very common in Nicaragua and accordingly very illustrative, and it represents extremely well a key problem in the Nicaraguan society regarding how the lack of sexual equality between the sexes deprives the girl of essential power constituents, such as social back-up and direct access to counselling. To a large extent, she is left to her own fate and thus extremely vulnerable. The parents of the boy “know and allow” that their son is having sex with his girlfriend, and in favourable family contexts the boy is counselled and admonished regarding risks and responsibilities. However, the boy’s parents do not generally, as a manifestation of good manners, talk either with the girlfriend or her parents. Accordingly, her parents do not know, nor, as a matter of course, want to know, that their daughter is sexually active. In combination with the common sense that girls should be rescued from the burden and embarrassment of talking about sex, girls can become hazardously exposed to sexual risk. Moreover, if the boy in question has got a sister, she is often similarly exposed to risk in relation to her boyfriend. If she ventures to tell her brother, there is a considerable risk that he does not fancy the idea of his sister having sex and he might even give her secret away to their parents, which might lead to a situation where they insist that she either marries her boyfriend or stops seeing him. Even worse, if she gets pregnant there is a considerable risk that she will be turned out of the house. However, if their son makes his girlfriend pregnant, it is not evident that the parents will assume responsibility.

…the parents avoid taking responsibility, saying to the girl that this has got nothing to do with their boy…that this is her problem as she looked for it…(10.3:1).

In other words, it is not uncommon that all responsibility is thrown on the woman.

Still, Raquel and her boyfriend did not use any sort of protection for three months.

We did not think of using anything yet. …I knew but…nothing has ever happened to me. …I have never got pregnant.
This statement implies that Raquel has probably been involved in relation(s) before. Nevertheless, her boyfriend obviously does not shoulder any responsibility for the conception, no matter the possible involvement of his parents and their possible admonitions, or maybe just because of their involvement, trying to save him from life-long obligations that would impede his studies and future career. In accordance with institutionalized norms, not only in Nicaragua, maybe he only needed Raquel for the development of his male self-esteem. From Raquel’s point of view, she has been repeatedly informed by her mother that she should refrain from sex, as men only exploit women for their own pleasure and after that just leave. The fact that a woman might also have sexual desires and needs is hardly ever recognized or considered.

Eventually he wanted her to take pills. But:

...I did not like the pills, neither use any kind of contraceptives, nor, condoms, nor anything...they do not appear to me as really safe.

This fear of contraceptives, *esta es la excusa que siempre nos dan que no es 100% seguro*16, is a direct, internalized reflection of the way the Catholic Church goes against safe sex and family planning efforts performed by, among others, NGOs working with reproductive health. Thus, adolescents are trapped between two main discourses regarding the use of contraceptives. On the one hand, a religious, dominant discourse, providing anti-contraceptive reason, and, on the other, an established scientific reproductive health discourse promoting pro-contraceptive reason.

These two competing truths are both present in even the most enlightened and liberal adolescent cognitive world. In that respect, the media play an important part concerning the general information that you should protect yourself and your partner by using a condom, just as they tell the public about the need to save water.

According to “barefoot safe sex educators”, this knowledge is unfortunately not sufficient to really make people use condoms. You also

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16 this is the excuse they always give us, that it is not 100% safe.
need to show how you do it and, furthermore, make this knowledge personally relevant. Otherwise nothing will happen. That is why, for example Club Conexión and CARAS (see chapter 7), thanks to their workshops, have achieved behavioural change regarding the use of contraceptives. Thus, one contributory reason why Raquel does not succeed in protecting herself from pregnancy might simply be the lack of applicable knowledge.

This attitude towards contraceptive pills is a very common, rationalized explanation among the interviewed women of why they did not protect themselves, although conscious that they should have and that the pills are on their side. Not “liking” and not trusting the pills makes the choice not to use them subjectively more rational and easier to “buy” compared with the “dump” alternative, which is choosing not to take precaution.

At the same time there is a cultural logic behind not liking and not trusting the pills, as they are banned by the church. The problem is that this type of remaining traces of the dominant culture thus becomes a sexual risk factor in the global post-modern sexual context, as the traditional banning is there but not the traditional society in which it is contextually rational, through its lineage with premarital sexual abstinence.

- But were you not afraid of becoming pregnant?

- No, not to start with... I did not think about the risk. Yes, I had talks here [CARAS] and knew about the risk it constituted, but it never went through my mind that I would become pregnant.

Francis Martínez: When taking decisions, the adolescents must consider what their parents are saying, what they say at school, the religious things; what their friends are saying; and what they say in the media of information – which means that it is difficult to take decisions when it comes to sex. Although you consciously know that it is bad not to protect yourself, you still have sex because you don’t know whom to listen to, whom to obey (10.3:2).
Raquel had other more romantic thoughts about her future.

- *I wanted to be with him [...to form a family]*

In short, Raquel was in fact culturally programmed for forming a family and thus felt no reason to bother about family planning. It was not until, as time went by, the signature of the relationship changed that the possible need for contraception (re)appeared on the agenda.

- *...to use the pills, that came afterwards. But before that we did not think.*

**Francis Martinez:** My parents always told me that I had to be professional and after that form a family. The priority for my parents always was that I should study, get a profession and work to become economically independent (10.3:3).

To a large extent, Raquel is a representative victim, an ideal type, of “the romantic illusory and assurative approaches”. She was really in love and wanted to be together with this boyfriend, and according to her understanding they both wanted to have sex:

- *...desire of us both; ...not only him, not only me, but the two of us.*

- The use of contraceptives was not really discussed?

- *Not in the beginning...we did not think of anything like that. But now...afterwards yes!*

Nevertheless, they were to some extent practicing coitus interruptus and she thinks that is the reason why she did not get pregnant in the beginning:

- *...many times ...he did finish in me. ...But when we eventually began having relations more regularly. Then, yes, I was thinking of taking pills.*
- But doesn’t that imply that you in one way or another did touch upon the subject of protection?

- Yes, because he told me that he didn’t want me to get pregnant.

In other words, they were, and still are, both aware of the advantages of applying preservatives but neither of them acts. They both leave to the other to take the initiative, which implies that:

- She does not have to reveal herself as “easy”, a “bad” girl who occupies her mind with thoughts about sex.
- They do not challenge the decree of the Church.
- He/they will “enjoy” the intercourse more without a condom.
- He will feel more ”complete” and ”fulfilled” as a man through free ejaculation.
- The romantic/passionate sensation is not disturbed by technicalities.
- She can test/evaluate her values as a woman.
- They can vivir el mejor momento.\(^{17}\)
- They can exchange el prueba del amor.\(^{18}\)
- Without contraception the whole sexual act breathes pureza.\(^{19}\)

- You seem to know enough about what kind of risks are associated with the practice of sex without using contraceptives. What does the Catholic Church say about sexual relations?

- …preserve oneself until marriage.

- What’s your attitude towards this thinking of the church?

- Yes, it is true that one should preserve oneself, as they say, the virginity, until one marries. But there are occasions when you lose your head.

- What about sexual education?

\(^{17}\) enjoy the best moment
\(^{18}\) the proof of love
\(^{19}\) purity
Well, they also told us that we should take care of ourselves; that there were several methods to use when we had relations; that we should take care of ourselves and not yield to temptations. Because many times the men only give us the belly.

- Did you forget?

- I forgot all of it.

- Did you think that it would be different for you?

- Yes, I thought it would turn out differently for me. But no! It was the same.

- Has your mother or anyone else had any influence concerning your knowledge about sexual relations?

- That I would not yield, hopefully...to not go out too soon... because after that, the consequences; have a child at a young age. There are a lot of consequences, indeed. Afterwards it’s not easy to work or study. That’s what she told me, but nothing about pre-servatives or pills.

This situation constitutes another crucial risk factor regarding early pregnancy. Parents inform their teenagers “plenty” about what they are not allowed or not supposed to do. However, very little is said explicitly about how and why to avoid getting into trouble. The boys are a little better off, at least if there is a father who is conscious of his responsibility. Not because much is said, but rather often the boy gets a supply of condoms in his breast pocket before he goes out.

**Francis Martinez:** There is only change if the way adults think can be eliminated, because that way the youth will not be corruped with bad information regarding sexuality. There is a need for a new generation of parents. To change the thinking of the old is difficult, the only thing to do is to change the way of thinking among the young. It’s very difficult to combine knowledge about sexuality with the religious culture (10.3:4).
Raquel’s father has not been involved in any counselling regarding sex but the theme is touched upon in the peer context.

- Yes, about contraceptives; that we should use them to not get pregnant; what type of contraceptive we could use.

The lack of communication about sexual matters in general, and between parents and their children and teenagers in particular, indeed constitutes a risk factor. To a considerable extent, adolescents are thrown upon their own knowledge and experiences. They know that they have to conceal everything concerning sex, especially if they are sexually active, from their parents. The problem is that most friends are in the same situation, that is, they don’t know.

Francis Martinez: We know that we have to hide from our parents the fact that we are having sexual relations, because if they find out, they will kill us. It is better not to tell. It all depends on the fact that what you think about young people is not correct. Before, I thought that the young woman got pregnant because she wanted to. However, it’s not so, because adolescents get pregnant because in reality they are unacquainted with the theme of sexuality. In class they do not approach the issue of sexuality in depth, and the parents think that they do, and do not take the responsibility to teach their children about sex (10.3:5).

5.4.1.2 As What Sometimes Happens in Telenovelas
Raquel does not like watching TV very much. Generally she only watches telenovelas, about 2 hours/day.

- Not much! I almost do not like... Only soaps!
- What is it that you like with novelas?

- ...the action! It’s very amusing.

Thus, Raquel, except for telenovelas, watches television less than what is typical of power girls in general.
Francis Martinez, herself, spends 4-5 hours in front of the TV. As most female informants, she prefers Brazilian soap operas to the Mexican as the latter always “are the same”:

The poor girl falls in love with the rich boy and she lives a life feeling humiliated by the parents of the boy and all the people around belonging to their class, but in the end, after a lot of suffering, there is a happy ending and they stay together and live happy for ever. The plots are different in Brazilian soaps, as they do not focus on one couple only but give more information about the the Brazilian reality, the life of the Brazilian family and the Brazilian society. Moreover the soap takes the opportunity to give information about their culture and marvellous scenes. They do not focus on the fact that you always have to be happy but confront themes that are real. One of the Brasilian sops that I liked very much was “El Clon” (The Clone) because it informed about the Arabic culture. They had several wives, spoke another language, etc (10.3:6).

- What do the novelas tell about sex and relations?

- …the girls have relations with the boys who leave them. Just like me! Or there are others who don’t, who marry them. Living together...having a happy baby! Everything! There are soaps where there appears very daring sex. They are filming them right in the bed.

Raquel says that she does not like this so much. She prefers the others where there is not so much sex.

- …but yes, I do understand that...the message that, as I told you, not having relations as very young girl, at very young age...hopefully not getting pregnant.

- The Mexican, like in Nicaragua...but not in the Brazilian. There you protect yourself and do not get pregnant. However, if you you do, you are left to your fate...but that happens very seldom.
- They are few, the soaps that show when the boys utilize the condom when they are having sex. At least it would show that the boys always carry with them a condom...and the girls also!!! Lately...scenes have been shown where there appear lesbian girls. Their mothers are fighting these tendencies in the novelas, among others things by sending these daughters abroad.

- Is this an issue that is touched upon in the telenovelas?

- ...also... The mother says to the girl that she must take care of herself, to not get pregnant; to not go out with boys. There are also soaps about adolescents where they know more about this. But, nevertheless...they have relations and get pregnant.

Francis Martinez: Normally, this is the theme that the mothers always take up; that girls must take care of themselves and not have sexual relations in order not to get pregnant (10.3:7).

Otherwise, Raquel does not really expose herself to any media messages. For example, like practically all informants, she does not really read magazines. Some friends do:

- ...they read about the advantages of the contraceptives...how to use them. How long you can delay...

Francis Martinez: The majority of the magazines are about spectacles. Because of a lack of electricity the radio is the most accessible medium (10.3:8).

5.4.1.3 A World beyond Motherhood Not Represented
Apparently Raquel does possess all the knowledge she needs to be able to avoid at least some of the risks involved in the act of sex. But the use of contraception never seems to constitute a real, substantial and conscious alternative. A possible world outside and beyond motherhood and family life is simply not represented in her mind, while it did exist in the thinking of her boyfriends.
Thus, under these circumstances, due to an unsettled possession of basic power factors, the need to protect and preserve yourself and not yield to the temptation – when the rationality behind these discourses is not in any way tied to perceived alternative, real life opportunities in the symbolic world of the girl – is not a true, real, substantial, rational, logical, eligible alternative. It is only a sham-alternative staged by predominating, traditional, conservative, hegemonic and ideocultural value systems.

Francis Martinez: Normally, in places where economic resources are scarce, or in rural areas, the parents teach their daughters what they need to know: iron, launder, cook, take care of the house, the children and the husband. Generally, the girls are educated to become mothers and housewives (10.3:9).

5.4.2 Sometimes you are not together the whole life\textsuperscript{20} – The Andrea Story

5.4.2.1 The only thing she said to me\textsuperscript{21}

Andrea, 17 years old, seventh months pregnant, also had to break off her secondary education, one year before getting her certificate. She has lived for 13 months together with her partner, without being married. Her mother never was very much in favour of their relationship, so she left together with him and now they live in the house of his mother. She has not protected herself at all since they started to have sex.

- …I told him that for sure I would get pregnant, well…it made no difference to me.

He was the one insisting on sex, while she resisted, with the motivation that she was studying and that she was afraid that her mother would find out. After 7 months she gave in.

- …maybe I did that because he was all the time telling me how much he loved me, that he wanted to be with me, and all that. In other words, he convinced me…I got myself involved with him…

\textsuperscript{20} Ocurre que no, uno no esta con su pareja para toda la vida
\textsuperscript{21} Lo único que me decia
without protection...as I had never used it, nor had he...then therefore we did not use anything.

In fact, she “wanted” to become pregnant.

- …I wanted to become pregnant because...I don’t know, I like babies...then...therefore...I was determined that I would get pregnant...but will probably start planning after the delivery.

Her plans for the future are pragmatic without much space for romanticism:

- …First I wanted to study to be able to work after that...provide for my children and everything. Sometimes you are not together with your partner the whole life. Then, at first I just thought that I would study first to maintain myself alone. Therefore I think about continuing the next year to finish my education. There is not very much missing. I want to handle my own money. Naturally, he gives me and everything, but that is not the same.

In other words, Andrea is trapped between the traditional and the “modern liberal”, and neither of these two norm systems gives any protection in this situation, as both the abstinence decree of the Church and the safe sex ideology of global culture are out of the running.

But, she fears:

- …for example, that I will separate from him...or that I will not complete my dreams to reach all the way in my education.

This fear of hers is also the one thing her mother always told her, that she had to study before committing herself in a relationship.

- …the only thing she told me...

Although her mother, who has got a small stall, is Catholic, she has not been very particular about the need for her daughter to get married first. But, as mentioned above, she was apparently worried
about what could happen, and did happen. Except for Andrea’s grandfather and an aunt in the house, her mother has on the whole been alone with four children since Andrea was very small. There is no contact with Andrea’s father.

- ...she does not talk to him ...

5.4.2.2 Mostly Telenovelas
The everyday life of Andrea is on the whole relatively quiet and peaceful without traumatic incidents. She does not attend mass regularly but rarely misses a procession, a spectacle she likes. Neither does she expose herself very much to mass media. She hardly even listens to the radio but does not mind checking out magazines when available. Most of them are Mexican. Relatively often, however, she does watch telenovelas on channel 2 between 7 and 9 pm.

- The seven o’clock novela is about a girl who was born in jail. The mother was wrongfully convicted: ...the soaps are dramatic, nice... I don’t pay attention to other programs...some leave messages, others no.

Even if she sometimes experiences similarities between the contents in the telenovelas, she cannot recall any situations in which the consequences of not using preservatives have been a salient theme.

- ...sisters, they flirt with the boyfriends of their big sisters and everything. There are cases that, yes, have happened in real life.

5.4.2.3 A World beyond Motherhood Not Represented
As in the case of Raquel, Andrea does not express much more than motherhood to look forward to, and, very pragmatically, she plans for a life on her own, with her children, with her own money. Beyond her plans for economic independence, there are no aspirations. As in the case of Raquel, and in accordance with the cultural logic, she passively made herself available for motherhood and the subsequent sociocultural acceptance of her as a real woman and a future senora. In both these risk cases, the girls have to a very limited extent been exposed to – or more correctly, due to social contextual circum-
stances, actively chosen to expose themselves to – sources carrying alternative ideas of existential values challenging traditional expect-
ancies.

5.4.3 It’s beautiful to be a mother, it’s beautiful to have children22 – The Carmen Story

5.4.3.1 You’ve got to do what you’ve got to do and make the best of it23

Carmen is 17 years old with 4 years of primary education. She finished school three years ago, because continuing her studies meant a change of schools, which made it impossible because of the distance and the lack of resources for any kind of transportation.24

Her mother, 39 years old, who got her first child, Carmen, when she was 17, has had 7 children to take care of, which has not been easy. Carmen does not blame her for anything. Her father is dead and she lived with her mother until she moved in with her partner almost a year ago. They had then been going steady for 6 months. After 2 months she got pregnant. She did not expect it to happen so soon:

- ...but as I did not prevent it...therefore I got pregnant faster.

Contraceptive measures were never an issue until she got her first child:

- He wanted me to get pregnant. He wanted a child. We were both agreed. After this I will prevent. The situation is too hard. There is no employment

Carmen is thinking of making use of injections or an intrauterine device (IUD). She feels that she has learnt about different methods at school, like the pills. But also that: ...you help each other among friends, and that you talk about things like: ...you must plan to not have so many children... Furthermore, that it in itself would be ..."nice" to have several children in the family, but ...

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22 Bonito ser madre, es bonito tener hijos
23 Bonito ser madre, es bonito tener hijos
24 …quedaba muy retirado venir estudiar hasta aqui, muy largo el camino entonces. Por eso no seguí estudiando.
As she already touched upon, herself, she is worried not to be able to provide for several children. She is taking care of the house and her husband …trabaja en lo que sale en el campo25. Definitely she thinks that it is too much with 3-4-5 children:

- A little boy would be nice, as it’s more convenient to have a boy than a girl…you have to buy more things to a little girl. …A boy can run around in his pair of pants…but not a little girl. It’s more comfortable...

Carmen says that she likes to go church, but that neither of her parents ever were really religious. Regarding the issue of virginity and premarital sexual relations she concludes:

- …almost did not comment anything on that.

Possibly this relaxed relation to Catholic tradition can to a large extent be assigned to her experience of religious competition from evangelical activities in the countryside.

- …I was into that.

Nevertheless, whatever she knows about how to handle her reproductive life and health in terms of avoiding pregnancy, it does not derive its origin from any of the Churches in Nicaragua.

5.4.3.2 Television and peers as sources of information
Carmen watches TV a lot, although she learnt from the Evangelists that it was the devil’s own invention. She does not read any magazines or newspapers, and she is not familiar with any NGOs. Most of all she likes the telenovelas, from which she thinks you can learn good as well as evil. For example, apropos of how you can learn things from telenovelas: …it is bad to have enemies …and you learn how to handle and solve conflicts.

- …almost the whole day I’ve been learning. Most of all I like the soaps…they divert…but they say that it’s not good to watch soaps… the evangelists say. They are not watching. They don’t like any if

25 …works with what turns up in the countryside
this. It’s a thing of the devil, they say, who knows? Because everything that comes out is...there you see relations, there you see murders and everything like that and...they say it’s bad. In the soaps there are disputes. There is reality also. Therefore all these things happen. That’s why it’s worse to watch soaps, because a lot of the things that you are watching are coming into your head...[as for example]...of getting involved with the brothers-in-law, in the soaps this is happening. That they kill each other, disputes, all this happens in the soaps... in one way it’s good because you learn. But, in other ways it’s bad.

Carmen is also fond of movies and cartoons. The children love “los muñecos” in the morning [animated cartoons on Saturday-Sunday mornings]. Above all she uses the channels 2,10,12, the most popular national channels in Nicaragua, especially 2 och 10, and she really likes “Los caballeros de zodiaco” [Japanese animated cartoon about five gentlemen/guerreros defending the goddess Athena] on channel 12. She also watches the news on channel 2 from 6 to 7 pm every evening, as that is the way to know about what is going on; ...because there you see what happens. Sometimes she watches television together with her girl friends and they exchange thoughts and ideas about most things, including sex and relations.

5.4.3.3 Active Motherhood and Being a Housewife26

the Pragmatic and Only Option

Carmen is really making the best of things considering the circumstances, above all the lack of resources beyond immediate survival. She is, like most of her many Nicaraguan sisters, very well aware of what is expected of her and what it takes to survive – including active family planning, which to some extent distinguishes her from many other women in the same situation. Nevertheless, limited access to the bases for accumulating social power limits her choice of alternatives, and thus her power over her life-situation. Being born in the countryside also constitutes a risk factor in itself.

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26 ama de casa
5.5 IN THE MIND OF THE POWER GIRL

5.5.1 I don’t want that for me − The Maria Story

5.5.1.1 Trustful contacts with adults

Maria is 20 years old and about to enter university. Her parents separated when she was very young and since then she has lived with her father’s mother in a household of 11 persons, among others uncles and cousins. Her father, her grandmother and an aunt, who is a nurse, are her closest allies. With them she can talk about everything. Her aunt seems to be an important substitute for her mother, with whom she has almost no contact. ...She did not invest much interest in the house. ...She knew she had responsibilities...but she left them. Nevertheless, Maria misses her and sometimes wishes her mother were by her side. ...I am sorry that with me...she is not interested.

Her plans for the future are very distinctly and positively formulated concerning what she wants with her life, and she leaves no space at all for premarital sex.

- ...Because I want to study and prepare and...not end up with a belly just now...and if I devote my time to the child I can’t study. First study and then have sufficient free time to devote only to him.

- ...I would like to develop and meet a person that also has this desire to succeed, form a family that is stable, so that the two of us progress and do something, let’s say, of permanent confidence, respect, communication and all this. ...that we walk together...provide for the family and that there are no problems..

This is the way Maria has always been thinking. Unlike several of her friends, she has, for some reason, very firmly taken the consequences of the social and cultural knowledge she shares with most adolescents in Nicaragua, namely the very strong correlation between early sex and early pregnancy in a cultural context combining machismo values and ambivalence towards contraceptives.

27 Ya no quiero eso para mí
-...a lot of young boys make the girls pregnant and then leave them... almost without bothering. ...Many girls leave their studies, become pregnant and end up selling things on the street. They will lose being with the child. The boy leaves it. I do not want that for me!

Actually, there are some friends of hers, who regularly practice sex without their parents knowing, and who do protect themselves with condoms and pills.

- But I imagine that they will end up pregnant...Adiós los estudios!

5.5.1.2 Relative Material Security
What is it then that has increased Maria’s possibilities to develop this protective shield in comparison with the typical risk girl? To start with, she is rich in power factors 1-3 and 5 (see section 6.4, p 131). Her father, with his own business gaining enough to allow a decent middle-class living, has always been caring and hugging and she has spent a lot of time on his lap. This emotionally important close contact with the father, combined with the lack of closeness on the part of the mother, seems to the be only major factor which distinguishes her from her twin sister Olga, who already has two children and does not study. Her sister has always been kind of rebellious in spite of equal, at least regarding level of ambition, attention on the part of the father and the grandmother.

- ...it was always the same; something for me, something for her. Always equal ...she liked to go out, but not me. I have always been more at home. ...She prefers to be on the street.

Accordingly, she has also always been comparatively closer than Maria to her mother, who, however, does not seem to fulfil the requirements corresponding to power factor 4 very well. My overall impression is that the major key to the understanding of the different fates of Isabel and Olga, respectively, is about power factor 2, which constitutes a resource that Olga, for several complicated psychological reasons, has been/become deprived of on the way.
5.5.1.3 Fairly Strict Adherence to Traditional Catholic Values
Maria’s contraceptive assertiveness corresponds to her identification with Catholic cultural values. As she has not had the intention either to allow herself to use any means of artificial contraceptives or to get pregnant, the only alternative is sexual abstinence.

- I’m Catholic. To the Church it’s a form of abortion. Then I am thinking that...I should not use it.

5.5.1.4 Constructive Peer Relations
However, very few of her friends think and act like Maria, as if her absolute standpoint is not taken seriously. The prevalent issue regarding sexual relations among her peers, predominantly on secondary school level, primarily deals with such things as if you want to marry, how many children you want, what would happen with your studies if you got pregnant and what the neighbours would say, and thus rather presupposes premarital sex as a matter of course, almost as something inevitable.

- There are times when they say that I am crazy thinking like that, that it’s out of date...that nowadays it is all different and that it doesn’t matter, but to me it does matter.

Sometimes she plays along and swims with the stream: ...I go with the stream...playing, but it’s not serious. I have my way of thinking and no one will take that out of my head

According to her own judgement, she has been spending more time at home, especially after completing colegio, compared with the general trend among her friends, which is to spend more time hanging out with their boyfriends. That does not mean that she does not go to parties, selectively:

-...go and have a good time with friends, talk, discuss a while and dance...but there are other...parties where there is liquor, where there are cigarettes, and not for me. I think it’s possible to have fun without these vices. It’s not necessary to drink liquor to be happy and that happens to a lot of young people.
5.5.1.5 Non-Demanding Traditional Boyfriend Relation
On the whole, there is much less social life and chatting among the girls nowadays. Maria does have a boyfriend, but their involvement with one another is not especially intensive. During the weekends they might see each other every day:

- ...always for a while, but not for long... I prefer to be there helping my grandmother in the house. Yes, I love him, but, I think just now... that we later on will have all the time to be together.

- Does he demand sex from you?

- No...because I think that it’s not necessary to oblige another person.

- But is it not rather common that the boyfriend urges sex?

- Many times it’s like that and for fear of losing him...one makes this mistake.

5.5.1.6 Social Consciousness and Curiosity
There are several different everyday bases of consciousness in Maria’s background that mutually reinforce each other and constitute the backbone, i.e. the interacting, collaborating, uniting and stabilizing foundations, in her unbribable conviction, and that have come to work together instead of competing or with counteracting each other towards confusion and frustration. The connecting catalyst is probably above all made of social consciousness and a social commitment to help and change. Among other things, this is where her father’s socio-political engagement, the social relief work, the Church, and the social reports and documentaries on television merge into a functional whole, a functional conviction that does not allow for any compromises with the prevalent global sex culture.

- The school was Catholic with nuns and monks and always they gave us...or oriented us about the fact that the women must get married...and about fidelity, respect. Always at school...they talked about that
- What about contraceptives?
- *Almost nothing.*

- How is this issue approached?
- *They do not accept it. To them it’s a form of abortion. But nowadays maybe a little...But always it’s the child that suffers...Because the parents abandon them, and when they get older, they send them to beg on the street and to avoid this problem, thus, there are occasions when they give information regarding prevention.*

- But, what about your understanding? How is it obtained?
- *From everywhere...family and...*

- The most important force?
- *My family, an aunt of mine...*

Thus, according to Maria, the most important source of knowledge and commitment is the family, and in the same breath, *una tía mía*. With her she can talk about everything, but also with her dad and grandmother, she adds in the next breath. As she is "daddy’s girl", her father’s social engagement in a popular organization, which realizes indispensable social work in poorer sections of the Nicaraguan society, seems to be one important fundament in her way of understanding her world. The logical chain of thinking is: not to expose herself to the risk of becoming pregnant - to be able to study - and thus help herself - so that she can help less fortunate children and adolescents.

- First of all...it would be with children; children in the street. Look into how to help them. Create a centre where they could grow, study, what they can do with their lives...and then it would be the youth with drug problems, alcoholism...because nowadays there is almost no employment and a lot of poverty. Hence, look into how to relieve
the children, the adolescents with drug and alcohol problems, and poor families…

- ...I want to study and in that way help these persons so that they also motivate themselves and seek to get out of...and progress...what I can teach them so they can get through.

5.5.1.7 Television a Resource for Learning
Interestingly enough, television seems to have constituted some kind of educational resource to Maria:

- There are programmes that show...youth that use drugs and seek how to get out of it ...that show families with this problem...cases from real life. I also like to watch programmes for young people where they give messages about life experiences so we [in the peer group] can discuss and comment on it, and I also like to watch horror movies.

- Do you feel that you have derived some of your way of thinking from your relation with television?
- Yes, because there are times...moments when it’s about how to live your life. As a way to give young people orientation, so they do not give in to this error...that they seek another path...
- Does that mean that you can find your way through this type of programs?
- Yes, really yes, when you are interested...
- Do your friends also watch television like you do?
- Some, but not always. They are few [without knowing why].

Maria does not really read the daily press; diarios y periódicos...almost not at all! Regarding TV-news in general:

- The only news programme I’m watching is “Primer Impacto” [North American programme with Maria Celeste Arraras]...I like
it very much…It’s a news editor that talks about…sometimes about a child that has this illness and gets help…Treatment…help…programs where something rare that occurs in another country…phenomena…yes, also they talk about politics, sports, give orientations about health, these things

- Do you remember if you have been exposed to any type of health or contraception campaign?

- No, not one...There was only a commercial [radio] about condoms that...was bad. Because they said that the condom is for enjoying the best moment [para vivir el mejor momento] and it's not like that...it is like teaching the youth that it doesn’t matter, what they do at whatever age...Maybe a 14-year-old-girl listens “condom, enjoy the best moment”. Then, I say, maybe in her head she will think that maybe this boy who is chasing her...she will do it. Maybe, thinking about this...and for me it would not be the best moment. Not like that, so young.

Moreover, Maria does not think that a condom can protect you from HIV:

- …HIV/AIDS no, for me no, you can’t prevent. No hay forma de evitarlo\(^{29}\) Always...independently, the condom can transmit HIV/AIDS.

5.5.2 My mother always told me to never be dependent on a man\(^{30}\) – The Isabel Story

5.5.2.1 A Mother

In the case of Isabel, 18 years old, it is her relationship with her mother that constitutes the dominating protective power factor, although she is rich in all of the others, too. Her mother was brought up under poor conditions, but she was a good pupil and gained opportunities through scholarships and became the only one among her siblings who seguía adelante\(^{31}\), and consequently she constitutes a very positive role model to Isabel. Aroused by the fate of one of her

\(^{29}\) There is no way to prevent it

\(^{30}\) Mi mama siempre me ha dicho que nunca va a depender de un hombre

\(^{31}\) advanced forward
friends who got pregnant and had an abortion already in secondary school, Isabel herself spontaneously accentuates the importance of the presence of a mother that cares.

- I did not live with my mother, only with my grandmother. I think she influenced me a lot. When you are not with your mother and don’t get on very well with your mother... There are adolescents that get pregnant, having mother and all but that’s a minority... When an adolescent becomes pregnant in spite of having her mother and getting on well with her... generally when getting pregnant I think it’s because they want to get pregnant... I had a friend that became pregnant and she wanted to get pregnant, because I don’t know... but she wanted to and it’s not the typical explanation when they say... her desire was to have a child with her boyfriend. I don’t know, or marry him, therefore... They got married but they are not together anymore. They got a divorce... in the third year [of secondary school] she got pregnant.

Francis Martinez: The relation with the mother can be good in all respects. However, if the communication regarding sexuality is not good... it’s possible that the daughter makes mistakes. The important thing for the adolescent is to obtain the correct information regarding sexuality to avoid committing errors that put their future in danger, but always communication with the mother is preferable, because if not, it can become the cause of double standards among the youth (10.3:10).

5.5.2.2 Relative Adherence to Traditional Catholic Values
As in the case of Maria, the contents of traditional Catholic thinking provide although in a more indirect way, cultural support to Isabel in the realization of her life project. This is, however, not for religious reasons as such, in spite of the fact that Isabel went to a Catholic secondary grammar school. Neither Isabel, nor her mother, really attends Mass except for the celebration of deceased relatives. Nevertheless, she has always imagined herself marrying en la iglesia, de blanco32, although she actually is very much in sympathy with the idea to live together with your partner first, to assure that you get along.

32 in the church, in white
- If you notice that you can’t live with this person, you don’t marry.

All the same, Isabel, so far, conforms to traditional procedures. On the one hand, she does that because of an implicit longing for the romantic ideals which indubitably lie inherent in the prevailing Spanish-American/Catholic/colonial family culture:

- ...that it is formal; that the boyfriend comes to my house to visit me; that my parents accept him; that you don’t have relations during the engagement... Then, after getting to know him well in my house and in the church, that I will have children, that I will not divorce...I think that if I start now it will not be the same when I marry.

**Francis Martinez:** When you, as a girlfriend, have relations with your boyfriend, he thinks he has rights over you. Hence in this meaning the relation changes, the man now feels that he is your owner and starts forbidding things, for example to go out with male friends, even female friends, or he doesn’t like that we use small items of clothing (10.3:11).

Even 21-23-year-old women tend to lie about their virginity, because they are afraid to be regarded as easy and, accordingly, not held in esteem as ‘señoras’.

**5.5.2.3 Aspirations**
On the other hand, there are purely socio-economic and emotionally rational reasons:

- ...I think that it for the moment is the time for me to have relations...to get pregnant. That will slow down the speed of my studies. Maybe having a boyfriend is not that bad. But...thinking thoroughly about these things...not have relations just now. When I have my career I can think more seriously about getting married or having children...because I do not trust contraceptives very much. They have always frightened me. I have always thought that I do not want to have children just now. Because relations always, or when I have sex...almost 100% I will get pregnant. Hence, when I’m thinking about this and the risk, it is better not to do it.
- I have various friends that already have children and they are doing badly;...Because, apart from having the child, they married.

Francis Martinez: The parents oblige their sons to marry when the girl is pregnant...and that is not good because probably their relation as a couple will not function, which can provoke traumas in the child. After some time together they will separate (10.3:11).

- If I had got pregnant, under no circumstances would I have married him. I think it’s more difficult. I don’t know, although I don’t want them to marry me by obligation ...and also that, a married life so young...I do not like. Hence, this helps me think in this way...Because every time when I think about this...when I am thinking about not wanting to become pregnant...I think that my life could be like my friends’ or worse. In that case I wouldn’t like it.
- I also had another friend who also had relations with her boyfriend and also had an abortion...this about the abortion made me reflect, because I said that it frightened me if I in the end decided to have an abortion. It will strike me with terror, because also one hears things, about the risk of dying or getting some infection. It scares me! Hence all this made me...that I am not thinking of having sex.

5.5.2.4 Television a Resource for Learning
Isabel feels not only that she watches television quite a lot, but also that TV through certain programs both made her interested in studying medicine and made her think that she had to get a life. Among other things, she remembers seeing programmes about deliveries, premature births, and the vaccination of children, and she still likes to watch the kind of programmes for example found on the channel People and Art/Gente y Lugares, ...este canal contiene programas de biografia de gente famosa, es educativo33; as well as series such as Sala de Emergencias, La Nñera and Ally McBeal...there are several. She also likes romantic films and comedies but seldom watches the news. In other words, Isabel has access to cable TV.

33 this channel contains biographical programs about famous people, it is educational
Regarding life, sex and relations, she mentions, in order of rank; television, the family and secondary school as the most important sources of information and knowledge.

- There are programmes on Sundays when this passage is touched upon...dramatizing youth in the message that...and at least in me...[meaning] ...if it represents youth I think it is like what the youth see and can learn from. That it also is from real life.

She remembers especially the program *Tita Ternura*, which was broadcast on channel 4 when she was about 15 years old, attending secondary school. As far as Isabel is concerned, it was a relatively popular program, at least among young people.

- ...the main characters in the series were those that always caused problems. Hence, there were times when we did not agree with some parts of the series and we commented on that.

- For example?

- The way they acted maybe. Maybe in the moment when they made decisions we didn’t like and we commented on it at school...”it’s stupid what he did”, like that.

- For example?

- ...maybe there was a violence problem in the family and...that the father violated her or forced her in some way and she didn’t dare to tell anybody about it. We commented that she ought to talk with her mother...to prevent it from going on...like that

- Did you learn anything that has been of use in your own life?

- With the thing about my studies, yes, it helped me...I saw it and thought better. It’s like I did not study very much in secondary...maybe it wasn’t important to me, I don’t know. I didn’t give it much thought. But eventually I realized that I had to...look more seriously upon the classes.
- Did this affect your way of viewing your own life and your studies or what?

- Maybe in relation to my friends...see how everything develops and how some get stuck makes you think.

- Is your career as woman part of that...if I don’t study...?

- Yes, also my mother always told me to never become dependent on a man. That I always have to value myself on my own account and not be dependent and have to ask my husband every time I need to buy something...to have a profession...so I can be respected and be seen...

– What is the principal message in the Nicaraguan mass media regarding sex?

- Protection! Above all protection! Because according to what I think it’s more difficult to prevent [protect yourself] when you are having relations and the best thing I think is to impress the need of protection. Maybe it does not prevent relations but it can be possible to make them protect themselves.

Francis Martinez: As young people we know that it is difficult to achieve that young people don’t have relations. However, the best thing the Government and the mass media can do is to teach methods to prevent pregnancy and protection from STDs. In the club we try to teach the young people not to initiate sexual relations too early, because it is more risky the earlier you initiate them, but also, as we are young people and know that it’s difficult to abstain, we teach them methods to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (10.3:13).

- But urging protection, does that not indirectly partly bring conflicting messages, as this implies that premarital sex is the norm and thus opposes the traditional view?

- Yes, maybe the bad thing is not to have sex but the consequences.
- So, the fact that your way of exerting power over your life to a very large extent corresponds to the value position of the Catholic Church does not self-evidently mean that it in every way constitutes the ruling view in Nicaragua. This implies that you, in a way, are struggling against the current, which apparently does not bother you, as you are so aware that power in your situation is to wait.

- Yes, what I think is that this is in each one of us, because...although the whole world says it, but I do not want to, I will not do it.

- What does the whole world say?

- That we must protect ourselves; although the artists [mass media profiles] say it...that if you are not conscious that you need to protect yourself you shall not do it...it helps considerably, but...

  Francis Martinez: If the programs of organizations do not give us consciousness about the need to take care of ourselves for these and these motives, the information they offer us will not serve any purpose at all...for my consciousness without action does not exist (10.3:14).

- What can help??

- The publicity or the propaganda...that you protect yourself...helps considerably but it is not the final word...Cases from the real world also help a lot.

  Francis Martinez: There is a programme on channel 2 called: "Margarita te voy a contar" [Margarita, I will tell you]. In this programme there are sometimes themes that are educational in different respects. Sometimes they touch upon themes like adolescent pregnancies and how poor persons live, and they relate stories about persons who have overcome their problems or stories about young people that use drugs. On one occasion it was about teaching two girls about the lives of people living in extreme poverty, as these girls demanded much from their parents, who, due to their economic situation, could not give them eve-
rything they wanted. Thus, they brought these girls to live with this poor family for one week, and in that way they got to know the living conditions of these very poor people; their children have no food, they have to go work at the garbage dump, they do not study. And after that week the girls apologized to their parents and thanked them for the little they could give them. Thus, by getting to know and live in others’ reality they changed their way of thinking, as their problems were not as serious as those of the other children. It was a very educational programme, and emotional, as you personally become very sorry when you observe how badly some families live; the needs and the hunger many children are suffering (10.3:15).

5.5.3 My priority now is to study34 – The Ana Story
5.5.3.1 A Mother and an Aunt
Ana, 19 years old, has not only got her mother but also an elder sister of her mother’s as back up. In addition, her aunt was also the one who made it possible for her mother, among 11 siblings, to study, le puso a estudiar, and become a secretary. They are 6 brothers and sisters, of which Ana and two younger brothers have the same father. Her mother’s first husband was killed. Ana’s parents separated, although never married, when she was 4 years old, because her father was muy bandido machista, who, besides having a lot of other women, also made her mother give up her job and become a housewife. Indirectly, this experience of her mother’s, who found comfort in religion, was the reason why Ana, although they did not have the money for it, was matriculated in a Catholic school for her secondary years. Thanks to her mother’s good contacts with the nuns, the school fee was to be paid through a whole-hearted engagement from Ana in the form of good grades and participation in all activities. In other words, Ana has got advanced schooling in Catholic thinking mixed with an antecedent stock of Sandinist thinking, which, among other things, was the reason why she had her first 6 school years in a public school.

5.5.3.2 Access to Critical Perspectives
Ana has always had plans to study. Before she decided that she wanted to study medicine, she was interested, among other things,
in computer science, English and engineering. Through missions organized by her school, however, she got into contact with deprived social contexts that made her interested in trying to become a paediatrician.

5.5.3.3 Television as a Source of Social Learning
As in the case of Isabel, Ana has watched television since she was small, even if "not so much", as in her family it was considered addictive, keeping people from doing something more productive. Nevertheless, she believes that television has been an important source of knowledge as well as of thinking, not least regarding sex and relations. Lately, however, revistas educativos\(^ {35}\), regarding, for example, reproductive health, have in this respect become more important to her and, thanks to CARAS, also available. As a girl she appreciated a magazine with varying contents called Magazine.

- There are magazines about...some surveys and investigations carried through...

As a teenager she watched a lot of telenovelas\(^ {36}\) and she still has a tendency to avoid news and similar programs, because she gets so upset by being reminded of all the social evils. Accordingly, she likes to distract herself with movies, soaps and comedies. More and more, however, she developed an interest for documentaries and programs about nature and medicine, especially phone-in programmes focusing on teenagers’ medical problems and fears, among others: La media naranja [channel 4, about for example reproductive health]; El medico en su hogar [channel 4, a doctor answering audience questions about health problems].

For the past six months Ana has also liked to read Entre Nos, a Friday supplement of La Prensa:

-...in which they bring up and discuss different themes regarding the home, sexuality and other themes, generally addressed especially to the youth.

\(^{35}\) educational magazines
\(^{36}\) soaps
Especially, she thinks that this constitutes an important forum where young people can communicate about sensitive issues without exposing themselves: “My boyfriend is dating another girl?”; “My girlfriend does not let me go all the way!”; “I want to have sex with my girlfriend who does not want to!” One channel consists in asking and answering questions by e-mails that are being published. There is also a section where you can get answers from, among others, a psychologist. However, for obvious reasons, it is hard to believe that this supplementary resource of counselling makes any difference to the majority of Nicaraguan adolescents yet, considering the uneven distribution of economic resources.

5.5.3.4 Access to Sexual Education
Ana received sexual education from her 3rd year in secondary school, that is, her 9th year in school. According to Ana, there is a growing tendency to give information regarding sexual issues even in strictly Catholic educational contexts as a pragmatic response to a growing number of adolescent pregnancies. But it is very different from school to school. Ana thinks that La Asunción is quite liberal compared with other Catholic secondary schools, such as La Recolección. Nevertheless, there are individual teachers who bring up the issue of contraception, not only as something to be banned but as an alternative to more advanced risk-taking.

- …permitted persons, specialists on the matter, to come and give us lectures. Then, after school, at university and at CARAS, much more information,…and in my house ever since I was a child.

Ana has also satisfied her curiosity through going to the library and asking her teachers for information and advice. Only CARAS, however, has contributed with truly profound knowledge about contraconceptsives.

5.5.3.5 Access to peer group experiences
They are five girls, who are very good friends, who keep together, lending each other advice and assistance. Still, one of them, 18 years old, got pregnant in spite of learning all the necessary facts about birth-control from Ana and her friends. Now it is this girl
who teaches the others to prevent the same thing from happening to them. She was planning on studying pharmacology, which she had to give up. A blessing in disguise is that both the former boyfriend and her and his families are helping out.

- She has had four boyfriends since she was 15 years old: ...Creo que elegido mal37. Earlier she was slightly desperate but now she awaits 'the one'. La prioridad mía ahora es estudiar38.

5.6 THE SEXUAL WORLD OF THE ADOLESCENT MAN

5.6.1 Strong Influence of Peers

Equipo Clelia Galeano: When asking a group of young people about who first talked to them about sex and different contraceptive methods, most of them coincide in saying that it was through a friend and less frequently a relative (sibling, aunt/uncle or parents).

In many families sex is taboo and that is why the young person, nowadays, will get to know many of these things through people outside the family.

A young boy related the following: “we were, within a group, talking about music and many other nonsense things, when one of them, looking at me, asked, have you done it yet? If I had replied no they would have considered that I wasn’t a man, so I answered that I had, but without giving any details about it. They then began to talk about their own first sexual experiences, and they commented that it is better to do it not using contraceptives, since the sensation will be much more pleasurable”.

When the boy finished speaking he told us that he, within a group of young ones, liked the idea of being able to speak freely about this theme, but he criticised one attitude, namely the fact that the boy hadn’t used protection. Being curious, he decided to consult

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37 I think I have been choosing bad
38 My priority now is to study
his older brother, who told him that one should always use protection.

Analyzing this example, we come to the conclusion that if this young boy had listened to and taken for true what his friend told him, he would have had an unpleasant experience that might have resulted in a venereal disease. It was therefore wise of him to consult someone he felt confident with and who also had more knowledge.

Far from every young person consults parents, siblings or other relatives about sexuality, and due to that there are many young people who act in an irresponsible way.

But many of us have the luck to have parents who wholeheartedly, freely and confidently talk to us about our sexuality, which of course is the most appropriate thing to do, and it would be so much better if this kind of information would more strongly be delivered in schools, no matter if they are private or public schools 10.2:1). Translated from Spanish by Traducit/Åsa Perez

To Francis Martinez ‘consult’, in this context, means ask for permission and she does not think that there, on the whole, is anybody equipped with sufficient liberty and confidence to talk with their parents.

5.6.2 Pick a flower…it awarded me esteem as a man…
I felt fulfilled

Sex as an absolute male practice constitutes, in Nicaragua, as in the rest of the world, early on a major formative issue in the lives of most men. Premarital sex with different girls is practically a prerequisite if you want to prove yourself as a man. Otherwise you might end up as a cochon (see Olsson 1996, p 8).

Indeed, the sexual world of young men must be designated as a pro-risk, culturally pragmatic, assertive approach:

39...Pica flor...mi imponía como hombre...me sentía como realizado; based primarily on information derived from interviews with Miguel and Orlando (sections 5.6.5-5.6.6) and friends, along with material from the work of Ann Olsson 1996.
- You must experience premarital sex in order to know what it is all about.

- You must test that you can make children and that your partner is fertile. I want a woman who produces (op cit, p 9).

- A man becomes more man if he has many children (op cit, p 11).

- A man becomes more man if he has got a lot of women. Then you are a real man...One always looks for a flower to pick...we are men and free... it’s OK to lie if you have more than one woman (op cit, p 7).

- Sex is recreation and orgasmic pleasure...but... Masturbation can make you weak and make you lose the sensations as well your mind. You can recognize people that masturbate. The only normal way to get satisfaction is through intercourse with the opposite sex (op cit, p 9).

- I mostly use a condom in casual relationships and to avoid STDs rather than conception...I have always protected myself. It has not been 100% with preservatives, because really before entering CARAS I did not know much about contraception. The normal thing to use was the condom. But now there are other methods, more modern. Through the centre I have learned how to use them. When one has a stable relationship the important method can be the IUD. But when the partner is not stable...in the beginning of relations, it is the condom. Because with the condom you are not only protecting yourself first of all from pregnancy. You protect yourself from sexually transmitted diseases that are very important to check.

In other words, the boys are raised to men by being encouraged to have premarital sex, while the girls are brought up to be good wives and mothers by being urged to refrain from sex before marriage.

- ...the parents inculcate into the son that during the phase of adolescence he has to have sexual relations as many times as possible. Hence, he starts, as we say, to pick flowers. Thus through as many sexual rela-
tions as possible he feels like more of a man...that’s what is happening. In fact, participatory observation reveals that parents, irrespective of socio-economic status, seem to feel proud and positively sanction, and through their body language and happy comments, *que bandito*, reward, their sons when they hint at sexual experiences. The same reactions are stimulated in situations when an adolescent son, who has not yet actually realized his sex debut, is revealing his ravages among the opposite sex. On the other hand, the same parents would hesitate to leave any of their daughters, 20 years old, or more, alone with their boyfriends. This spontaneous behaviour is as evident in homes where well-educated, gender conscious, women’s lib, single mothers rule. Boys and girls are raised differently, in accordance with different value and rule systems. Without thinking, almost instinctively, deeply rooted cultural agreements and a gender differentiated agenda concerning sexual rights, that is, patriarchal hegemony, are being reproduced through the family as a knowledge institution.

Thus, machismo life to a considerable extent constitutes a stressful continual practice, without rest, of testing and attesting your own cultural and biological value as a man while looking about for the appropriate partner.

5.6.3  ...if a woman gives in easily, she won’t do\(^{40}\)

- You never ask for sex before marriage if you really like a girl. There is one girl to date, one to have sex with and the woman to marry and have children with (Olsson 1996, p 8).

As a man, you are not only bound to test and prove yourself; you are also continuously testing your girlfriends, who are expected to play the classic game of being both complaisant and chaste at the same time. The girlfriend’s social, cultural and sexual/physical well-being depends to a considerable extent on her ability to prove her love and establish without a doubt that she is not a loose, easy, woman, but abstemious and capable of defending her virginity through fair and foul. This balancing is not an easy task, considering the enormous pressure, in the form of contradictory expectations, that the adolescent women is subjected to, not only from her boyfriend but

\(^{40}\) ...*si una mujer cae rapido, no sirve*
also from friends, parents and the social and cultural environment as such.

- As we say, with the therapy...Then, he says, I will give her my therapy and at this moment...he is not pushing her very much. But always be will be there insisting...and at a given moment his object will give in...If the woman does not want to at this moment he can say that it does not matter, we hope. But always be will be there insisting, asking her...

In fact, you could say that to be able to be a power-girl you are indirectly deprived of the daring to fall in love. She cannot afford to really devote herself, since it is implicitly expected that she must say both yes and no and moreover shoulder the responsibility for contraception and family planning. It is expected that she, at least in explicit terms, is not especially interested in, or familiar with, sex-related issues and problem areas. At the same time she knows that if she does not accept sex with her boyfriend someone else will:

- ...you have your girlfriend and if she does not have sex with you, you can have it somewhere else...And to me there is no difference, as you run the same risk...Normally there are two things that occur. The man seeks sex elsewhere or leaves his girlfriend.

- I think we are thinking in the wrong way when we are entering an engagement. In my opinion, it’s to get to know the woman, how she reacts towards different problems, get to know her sexuality and she to get to know my sexuality, and after that seek sex, after that.

- Why after that? Because if I like her way of being, her way of acting... We can form a stable couple. But if I only seek sex in my girlfriend...we will apply the therapy. The therapy will surely make her give in to sex. Then...normally during the engagement it’s permitted to kiss on the mouth and caress. But when, during the kissing and the caresses, one gets excited and when these excitements have no limits...then some, or the majority of adolescents...we cannot control this excitement. Maybe later when we have passed a lot of experiences we can dominate the excitement. But until then, we have
not psychologically prepared ourselves to restrain our excitement. So, when we get too excited, besides the therapy that we used on the woman that will make her fall into sex.

- Also there is machismo. Because...if you have sexual relations with this woman, with this girl,...afterwards you tell about her. „I had sex with her“. With his friends...going around telling that he had sexual relations with her as if he already had forgotten her...as if it didn’t matter...

Francis Martinez: It’s important what he says. Often the guys exert pressure on their partner to go on having sexual relations and if she does not do that they threaten with to bring them into disrepute, talk badly about them (10.3:16).

- The most difficult thing is to get a girlfriend, because when you have got a girlfriend the man comes, which starts with the lip, with the therapy. “Oh my love”, and so on! Then the woman starts thinking more about the sexual game, and it influences her so that the woman gets excited and and gives in faster. But what happens afterwards? The man comes and then he leaves. But why does he leave? He already has achieved his objective...To get a couple more or less stable...if a woman gives in to me more rapidly and has sexual relations with a man we think a lot...“that is an easy woman who I succeed with so soon”; another man will have her as quickly. Thus, thinks the man: “I’d better leave as this woman is easy”...And not only the man, but also our mothers. If we tell her our experience: “...if you succeeded so quickly, she will do it with anybody”. Then we get...preoccupied and we say that she won’t do.

- This is what happens. When a woman is trying...she is good. But if a woman falls quickly, she won’t do.

- ...the love, the passion is quite ample...the woman falls in love, very radically with the man, I think...She has better...she expresses herself better in love, the woman. Then, the man takes advantage of that:

- ‘Give me the proof of your love!’
- ‘No, my mother will tell me off, she can throw me out of the house!’
- ‘Don’t you love me?’

- Some of us know, that, if this woman really is in love with us. Then, many times we take advantage of that... But now I’ve changed.

5.6.4  ...if a woman is liberal...wants to make progress, she won’t do

Although more and more challenged, the exnominated culturally hegemonic agreement, generally maintained by both parents, is that it is in principle desirable that the woman submits to the man:

- ...and a woman who wants to make progress...won’t do for the man... That is what our mothers say... that if a woman is liberal, she won’t do. But if she resigns herself, then, she will do.

Nevertheless, things are changing – even if being ”liberal” as a woman in this context, in the male world, generally means fácil, that is “easy”, while the liberal woman considers herself “independent” – and more modern views have prevailed, among other things that an employed woman means more income and, consequently, progress for the household.

Still - if the adolescent woman KNOWS, on the basis of generations of cultural experiences, that she risks being abandoned, at least as a prospective wife, practically the very moment she yields to her boyfriend’s craving for sex - why does she do that, and, in addition, without actively protecting herself? Once again, the main explanation is about power, as addressed above. Her motivation to resist la terapia is determined both by her perception of alternative opportunities, for example in terms of aspirations, and by her actual access to these alternative opportunities.

Aspirations and expectations are, of course, to a considerable extent fostered and determined by socio-economic conditions. There are, however, also examples of families where one or several siblings consciously, in spite of a higher education, actively choose to be a housewife, ama de casa.

41  ...si una mujer es liberal, ...quiere seguir adelante, no sirve
42  the therapy
Francis Martinez: In a family where the mother has never had a work position or her own income but instead has always been supported by her husband, the daughter will be raised into becoming a wife who tries to conform to her husband’s needs and she won’t have anyone around her to help her to become an independent woman, and as a result it will all repeat itself. Both parents tell their daughter that she has to know how to wash, iron, cook, attend her husband and because of this she will not develop the way of thinking that could make her become an independent woman. This has a lot to do with the level of education. In most families they normally give priority to the education of the sons. Then, if the parents don’t have much money to afford an education for all of their children, they will prioritize the sons and the daughters won’t have the opportunity to study (10.3:17). Translated from Spanish by Traducit/Asa Perez

5.6.5 CARAS made a difference – The Miguel Story
The Miguel story illustrates the importance of sex as a major formative issue in the lives of men. Miguel made his sexual experiences through petting at the age of 12. He wanted to test what he had seen on pornographic videos and heard from men in his entourage.

- ...what was it really that you felt?

He was 10-11 years old when he made his first acquaintance with pornographic movies. He and some friends his own age and a little older were invited by his cousin, 16 years old, who also paid Miguel’s admission to this cine illegal, as he calls it. Actually, the illegal portion concerns their age, as the video store offering the show is not allowed the entrance of minors. This happened during the Sandinist era. Nowadays, virtually everyone has access to a video and TV and accordingly also to pornographic films, which are for rent here, there and everywhere.

Interviews with men suggest that it is not uncommon that (young) men in Nicaragua, like men in general, get inspired by and use pornography for excitement as well as a sort of manual for how to make love. This is of course very easy to understand in any social context where natural access, through legitimate channels, to sexual as well
as erotic development is obstructed. Interviews with girls suggest that their male partners often want to repeat and try ideas derived from pornography, such as anal coitus. Girls are also checking out the secrets of pornography, sometimes alone, sometimes with friends or invited by male friends. Predominantly, pornography is watched at home or in the house of a friend.

Miguel had his first intercourse when he was 14. Mostly, early sex debuts among boys seem to correlate with the presence within the family of somewhat older female relatives, like first and second cousins.

-...To me it was good because I achieved my objective: satisfy my personality. But I don’t really know to what degree I satisfied...succeeded in satisfying the other person...Although after the relation I thought a lot and was afraid... [that he had made the girl pregnant].

But it was not only the first intercourse that was unprotected, but many:

- ... I risked my life...my future. I endangered the future of another person. Today I think differently thanks to CARAS.

When Miguel was 12 he had heard about condoms but did not know how to use them. When he was 14 he also knew how to use them, but didn’t, because:

- ...what they inculcated in me was: more satisfaction when not using a condom...I listened to those who were a little older...that is was better without a condom...

From this initial stage of his ”male-training”, he does not recall any situation at all when a condom was mentioned as a protection against pregnancy or diseases only ...how you felt the pleasure better, nothing more43. A friend of his, also 18 years old, who still insists on not using a condom because he does not feel the same, is already the father of 4 children with 4 different mothers.

43 de que manera se sentía mejor el placer, nada más
5.6.6 So, when does a man consider the use of a condom? Mostly, the most common reason among men for using a condom is to protect yourself from STDs when you meet someone you really don’t know at a party or on the beach.

- ...after having certified that the girl is not infected they stop using it...because they think that she cannot become pregnant...

Both men and women often gamble with safe periods, trying to keep track of risky days. The problem, as a young man expressed it: you have in your mind that a woman can only be fecundated once a month...the problem is that you don’t know what day that is.

- Also you use a condom when you don’t have a stable relation, a woman with whom to have relations...one goes to places...then the man uses a condom...it’s about having confidence in the person...because you also go to these places together with your girlfriend

- ...regarding intercourse with preservatives, it is the man who takes the initiative. But, there are also the women...they ask you if you are going to use it...sometimes she has...But in general it’s the man who takes the decision. But I think that it should not be like that, because the woman ought also to...still it’s the woman who is more at risk...for example if she has not finished secondary school, which will result in a lot of social and economic problems.

...it will smash up your life cycle, your future, your dreams...44

At the same time, the hegemony of machismo ideology often makes it difficult for the woman to insist on condom use, as she is not seldom exposed to both violence and threats.

5.6.7 A curiosity to know45 – The Orlando Story
Orlando made his sexual debut at the age of 12:

- ...we were both curious and as both our parents were working, leaving us alone...and also there were pornographic magazines.

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44 te fractura tu ciclo de vida, tu futuro, tus sueños...
45 Una curiosidad saber
Another thing was the influence of the television, because when you watch the soaps. There are spaces where they have sexual relations and they present it as perfectly normal. Hence, it’s the curiosity at this stage [adolescence]. At this stage we are not aware of the risk… Penetration without ejaculation…several experimentations with her, but to a limit when she said: ’hasta aquí no más’

They practised sex off and on until they were 13-14 years old. Eventually they learned more and more about risks, and she was the one who decided that it was enough:

- …and as I always since I was a child have thought that you must respect the opinion of others…

Consequently, Orlando had no problem accepting her decision. The whole thing, as Orlando sees it, was about experimentation without any deeper thoughts about this being the woman with whom to spend the rest of your life.

- … a curiosity to know…

Accordingly, people in Nicaragua, as well as people in the rest of the world, handle their sexuality in many different ways, as we are all inscribed in a variety of different, among themselves more or less competing, meaning systems and discursive communities. The meanings we are equipped to derive and internalize as the ”common sense” on the basis of which we make our decisions and choose our way, are thus largely determined by the range of our own access to alternative meaning systems and how this assortment of alternative reference models is mixed with the contents of the socio-economic context within which we live, receive and interpret the world.

By studying the most important knowledge institutions in Nicaragua, it is possible to bring the arenas of this symbolic struggle to light, and thus the competing discourses and their bases, where different meanings of sexuality are promoted and cherished. Not least, it is about researching those ideas and practices that sexual life is

___46  thus far , but no longer
related to when they are realized in everyday activities performed by school, the mass media, the religious institutions, the Government and the NGOs.

Comparative interviews with Swedish and Nicaraguan youth, in the upper secondary school, indicate that young women in Nicaragua are generally not in possession of any real freedom of choice in the practice of their sexuality, compared with their Swedish peers. There is, in reality, few other possibilities for the Nicaraguan girls to exert power over their life situation than to explicitly say no to sexual relations, as long as they still have aspirations and material prerequisites to build their own platform for independence, for example through education. Paradoxically, in this situation the traditional rule of the Catholic church becomes a progressive force, as the dominating norm system makes the ”no” of the girl legitimate and both understandable and acceptable to the boyfriend, even if he, in accordance with demands of the machismo syndrome, will still continue insistently to give her his “therapy”, i.e. dance attendance upon her in the most refined ways, and ask for her prueba de amor, that is, her “evidence of love” by agreeing to sex.

Francis Martinez: To have a lot of different girlfriends, a lot of sexual relationships, and not use a condom, is to a majority of the men equal to sexual control. This is due to the fact that only a minority of the men have received good sexual education. Those who have that educational background know that they have to take care, and use protection against STI (Sexually Transmitted Infections). They are also aware of the fact that you are not more of a man for having a lot of sex and that it is wiser to take care, even though they also maintain a certain macho culture. I believe that the macho culture will be very difficult to eliminate, but through good education and time it will diminish in the Nicaraguan society (10.3:18). Translated from Spanish by Traducit/ Åsa Perez.
6 BASICS OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE EMPOWERMENT

6.1 RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AS A HAMPERING CIRCUMSTANCE

The Catholic Church is comparatively liberal and tolerant compared with corresponding Evangelist communions, among others Jehovah’s witnesses, who, for example, do not allow either make-up or dancing or dating. Nevertheless, all in all, most religious societies in Nicaragua are allied in their common resistance to sexual education and the use of artificial preservatives.

**Equipo Clelia Galeano:** All Nicaraguan boys and girls are very much influenced by religion. Even though there is no official religion, there are predominant groups, for example Catholics, who represent a majority; those young ones who belong to this group are freer and allowed to go to dances and to have a boy/girlfriend, and they speak more freely about their sexuality. The evangelicals are a more limited group. They tell their young ones that it is prohibited to dance, since that is an offence to God. The girls are not allowed to wear make-up or to have boyfriends. Jehovah’s witnesses are very much alike and in both of these groups they forbid the young ones to talk about their sexuality, and it would be even less accepted to turn into the subject or the object within that same theme.

Contraceptives are not mentioned by any of these religions, not even the Catholics, who are the most open ones. According to them, you should only have sex if you are married and you
should have the children God has given to you. We do not agree on that, because we are really convinced that we are our own masters when it comes to our bodies and we are the only ones who could decide when it is time to have sex, with whom and how. This also implies a sense of responsibility, to protect ourselves from diseases, and plan how many children we will have and when to have them (10.2:2). Translated from Spanish by Traducit Åsa Perez

Accordingly, considering the strong influence of religion in Nicaragua, combined with the fact that the practice of premarital sex seems to be more the rule than the exception in the everyday life of the Nicaragua population, the churches of Nicaragua act as a check on, for example, conscious and progressive use of contraceptives, and thus on development of sexual empowerment and equality of opportunity between the sexes. The preventive strategy of the religious sectors of the Nicaraguan society is cognitively passive and predominantly about sexual premarital continence, which, with reference to available empirical evidence (see chapter 8), indeed seems to be a lost battle against the burden of unwanted pregnancies and STDs. Thus, if empowerment, among other things, is about gaining mastery over one’s life and increased freedom of opportunity (see Tengland 2007 for a more comprehensive philosophical account of the empowerment concept) and, accordingly, sexual and reproductive empowerment – by means of, among other things, knowledge about sexual health hazards and easy access to contraceptives and counselling and medical services - is about gaining control of the determinants of reproductive health, then the religious communions of Nicaragua, unfortunately, do not in their everyday practices contribute considerably to sexual and reproductive empowerment as it is commonly understood in the worldly-minded global community.

Francis Martinez: The religion constitutes a big stone on the road through which we will gain sexual power, as, since I was a little girl, it has inculcated in us a determined religion, and this inculcated that we should respect what our husband tells us, that we should attend of him in the best possible way, take care of the home and the children, that the contraceptives are not correct,
that they should not be used by the married women together with their husbands, that we shall have all the children that God sends us. Finally the religion teaches the woman that she shall be submissive to her husband.

In the Nicaraguan society religion has a big influence and is therefore a factor which is very difficult to defeat. Thus, as adolescents and youth we have a double standard, as we are expected to behave in a certain way in front of our parents and the rest of society, but what we really do and are is very different (10.3:19). Translated from Spanish by Traducit/Âsa Perez

This statement by Francis Martinez, that ...as adolescents and youth we have a double standard, as we are expected to behave in a certain way in front of our parents and the rest of society, but, what we really do and are is very different, indicates and illustrates the risk-producing dilemma of the culturally produced disadvantageous compromise for the adolescent who simultaneously wants to explore her/his sexuality and to comply with the expectations of both parents and partners. Neither abstinence prescribed by the churches, nor the use of preservatives damned by the same churches, is to be taken for granted in the sexually complicated situation. Rather, the cognitive and affective ambivalence deprives the adolescent of control and the possibility to gain mastery of his/her reproductive health, a situation that is of course not exclusively specific to Nicaragua.

6.2 THE UNEVEN DISTRIBUTION OF SEXUAL EDUCATION AS A HAMPERING CIRCUMSTANCE

Sexual education is unevenly distributed among different population layers and different types of educational institutions. To a large extent, qualitative data suggest that private schools are more developed in communicating knowledge about sexuality and the use of preservatives, which also implies that contents and quality of sexual education are determined by class. As knowledge and education generally are considered as one of the most powerful counters of empowerment, and thus an indispensable ingredient in the struggle against teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, the Ministry of Education has, of course, an important responsibility
when it comes to democratizing the distribution of cognitive development among all sectors of the population as well as facilitating access to, among other things, sexual knowledge and consciousness. This responsibility is not least about providing scientifically well-founded alternative truths to the uncontrollable exchange of disinformation among friends in the street.

**Equipo Clelia Galeano:** *In our country it is obvious that we all have equal access to education. Still, it is not completely fulfilled. Every year there are thousands of young ones who are left out with no right to begin studying at a university. There are great differences when it comes to the young ones’ knowledge and then also when it comes to their sexual empowerment, and it is linked to their level of education. There are boys and girls who study at public schools and who are not so fortunate as to be told about their sexuality, and there are others who study at private schools and by that are given this advantage. Of course this is not the case in every school. Besides, it also depends on the many issues that the ministry of education allows the schools to communicate. According to them and many adults, young people shouldn’t be told about sex and contraceptive methods, as they believe it pushes them to have sex (the truth is that they consider us to be stupid. They do not believe that we are capable of deciding that we can take responsibility for our own sexuality). If they only knew the fact that somehow all the young ones anyway become aware of these themes that continue being a taboo to some of the adults. Every young person gets to know, individually, experiences related to our sexuality, and those experiences depend, to a large extent, on our knowledge and ultimately on our parents. Among us there are parents who, even if they are educated professionals, didn’t have enough confidence to be able to talk to their children about their sexuality and contraceptive methods, maybe because their own parents never talked to them about these matters. At the same time there are parents with no education who did talk to their children about it. We have come to the conclusion that it doesn’t really depend on the level of education of the parents, but on the communication, trust and confidence between parent and child (10.2:3). Translated from Spanish by Traducit/Åsa Perez*

**Francis Martinez:** *Of course the parents’ level of education has to*
do with the problem to talk about sex. Even if the parents, who have been educated, would speak to their children, it means that they would probably give bad information about sexuality since they themselves were not informed about it (10.3:20). Translated from Spanish by Traducit/Asa Perez

6.3 PRIMARY SOCIALISATION AS A HAMPERING CIRCUMSTANCE

An important problem – strangely enough predominantly confirmed independently and spontaneously by male informants – is that the syndrome of resigned subordination is still to a large extent cultivated and reproduced by the many mothers, las señoras, themselves, by means of their way of socializing their daughters, inculcating the importance of being a good housewife, ama de la casa, rather than aiming “too high”:

...Because I have recently heard that when a woman marries she does not have the possibility to continue her studies, she does not have the possibility to work because her mother says to her: “for what reason study...dedicate yourself to your child. Don’t look for three legs on the cat when you know that it has four of them”.

In other words:

... the same mother says to her: “subordinate yourself to the man”.

...Because it is the only income that she has...and she does not have any economic income because the man knows that if she has an economic income...It’s important that the mother really instructs...not only the daughters but also the guys...It’s important with this type of family education...a cultural formation of every family...

This kind of socio-cultural awareness is often shown in the interviews with young males, especially among informants who in one way or another are linked to CARAS or other NGOs working with, for example adolescents, reproductive health and/or domestic rights. Among other things, they confirm, quite annoyed, some of the ruling double standards obstructing processes of sexual and reproductive empowerment among girls.
One example is about the wife of the neighbour of one of the male informants, a mother of, so far, two children, a boy and a girl. In the fifth grade of primary school she did not let her daughter attend class when they started to teach about sexual organs, because, as she stated: *they were only teaching vulgarities*. Her opinion was that education should not be the same for boys and girls. A corresponding idea, according to my male informants, namely that primary school constitutes a sufficient level of education for girls, is particularly common in poor families and in the countryside.

What is most noteworthy about the above-mentioned example regarding how mothers educate boys and girls in different ways is that its extent is not limited to exceptionally conservative families, quite the reverse. Instances of participatory observation reveal that even in the most exceptionally enlightened and educated family contexts parents are not naturally aware of the fact that they convey different messages to boys and girls. Even if the general lack of everyday sexual education in the home is shared by both the sexes, the difference is obvious in the way that, for example, contraception is marginally touched upon. While condom use is not explicitly mentioned, the father is indirectly addressing the issue to the son by, for example, sealing the secret understanding between men through the act of putting a condom(s) in his son’s breast pocket before he leaves for his date. Apparently, few parents are normally supplying their daughter(s) with condoms.

Under favourable circumstances, contraceptives are discussed and distributed between brothers and sisters and within peer groups. Furthermore, even if “modern”, “liberal” mothers, predominantly in urban environments, explicitly do not instruct their daughters to resign themselves to their men, they still firmly inculcate the importance of the fact that a woman must know how to manage a household and that a woman must prepare herself to carry double burdens, to have her own employment and take care of the house, or even to carry three burdens, as they must also be prepared to take care of their husband to reduce the risk of being abandoned.

In other words, the daughter has to deal with double, competing messages: on the one hand that she must avoid getting caught in a situation where she becomes dependent on a man, a rational message
surely based on reason and the mother’s own experience, and on the other hand, she, to prepare her daughter for the reality, mediates, more or less explicitly, prevailing cultural patriarchal agreements regarding the naturalness of female subordination. Once again, both worlds, one of them more silent than the other, are simultaneously present in the everyday life of the adolescent, and boys and girls are, as far as the parents are concerned, more or less unconsciously integrated in the social community in different ways on different conditions, which hampers empowerment.

But the same girls are pressured to have sexual relations…Because here in Nicaragua, if an 18-25-year-old girl has not had sexual relations, the same girl is blamed for being lesbian…as homosexual…also we say mannish (Miguel).

Francis Martinez: This situation might occur when a girl is to be accepted within a group of friends, i.e. to actually become part of a group they might ask if you have had sex yet and often they tell you that you are out of date if you haven’t had sex yet (10.2:21).
Translated from Spanish by Traducit/Åsa Perez

In other words: …our society, high or low [social class], is contributing to people having sexual relations at a premature age. Why? To demonstrate that yes, I am a woman and to demonstrate that yes, I am a man. Thus the same society makes us react like this … [having premature sex].

Or, although “the society” maybe does not explicitly encourage early initiation of sexual activity, still there are culturally deeply rooted expectancies regarding social practices connected to the completion of sex roles, and indirectly there are several mutually interwoven practices that encourage premature sexual activity, especially among young men. And, if not sooner, when a young woman is reaching her twenties she is exposed to the urging question: have you married yet? Thus, most friends of a female informant, at least 60% she states, from secondary school, are married and/or parents at 21 years of age. This is what is normal!
- It [society] does not directly contribute to us having relations… saying that it allows us to have relations but yes, it exerts pressure in the meaning that after 22 years of age maybe we ought to look for how to get married and thus form a future together with the partner and in this sense the society exerts pressure that you marry young (female informant).

- There are few cases when the young marry because they want to and not because they are obligated, meaning that, commonly they marry because she is pregnant (female informant).

Only two of her friends are married without children.

Francis Martinez: Already during the childhood one can see that society drums into your mind the different roles of the men and the women in society. The boy is only allowed to play with toy soldiers, cars, footballs and the girls are given a toy kitchen, dolls and teddy bears, so at a very early age society has clearly stated that the female tasks are all within the household. In those cases when the girl plays in the same way as the boys she will be assigned the name tomboy.

Maybe during the childhood we won’t notice these differences but, nevertheless, when reaching the teens these differences are clearly marked.

As a child I was a girl who liked to play with the boys’ toys. Maybe that was because in my family we were only girls and my parents never told me that I shouldn’t play with those toys. I remember that my cousin also liked to play with them, but since she had a brother he used to tell her that she wasn’t supposed to play with his toys since they were only for boys.

Maybe the difference between us consisted in the fact that I had sisters only and she had a brother who was supposed to do things meant for boys. Another example is a neighbour. They are two sisters and one has a daughter and the other a son and they are the same age. The different treatment of them is obvious because when the girl does
something incorrectly they scold her, but the boy is hit. When she cries they reason with her, but when he cries, he is told not to, because only girls cry.

This overprotective attitude from the parents might produce romantic expectations in the girls when thinking about life. However, as the daughter grows she is not allowed to hang out with friends and have boyfriends and it is difficult to get through those changes in the parents’ behaviour in the relation to their children.

Another problem is that the education we get in school is very limited. We only know of the general ideas about sexuality. Being curious young people with little information offered, we try to inform ourselves by asking our friends. A majority of them are not familiar with the correct information about sexuality.

To the teenage girls it is more difficult to have sexual control if there are brothers. The parents will allow him to do many things, like hanging out with friends, having girlfriends and condoms in his pockets, things they would never allow their daughter to do. As a result the women are forced to do their things in secret and most of the time they lie to their parents in order to be able to hang out.

In many cases these girls become rebellious against their parents. They cannot stand the imprisonment they are kept in and their solution might be to have a boyfriend and move in with him, in that way being able to escape their parents’ control. Though many of them are informed about contraceptives, many of these girls become pregnant because they are in love, believing that if there is a child the boyfriend will stay with them for ever. Then she discovers that she was wrong and she will be rejected by society and her family and she then loses her self-confidence. This situation will complicate her possibility to raise and educate a child. She considers none of the things she does to be good enough and she sees no joy or pleasure in life, nothing matters, not her husband, not the family, not the children and as a result, the repetitive chain of conformism is initiated. A conformism
transmitted to the children who believe that since their parents suffered the same thing, it is not strange that they themselves also have to go through it... They believe that the same thing will happen to them, i.e. the women fear that their partner might leave them and the men don’t feel any responsibility for the children and leave their wives.

Because of this the parents should impress upon their children that they (the children) have to improve and become better than them (the parents). But what happens is that this only occurs in a few families, since the parents in most families do not tell their children that education is something important in life. There are even many who consider education a waste of time.

On the other hand, the boys initiate a relationship very early because they are pushed to do that by their parents and friends, who tell them that it is better to have sex without a condom since you in that way will be more sensible and feel everything better. Then the boys, imagining things, go into a sexual act without knowledge and no protection and this is how they are infected by STI.

I know of a family with 9 children whereof 3 are girls. Their mother told them to obey their future husbands, and the father and the sons, they claim that the girls have to study and work in order not to end up having to stand their husbands’ assaults or abuse. Probably these girls do not have boyfriends because of that, i.e. because they do not want to lead the same life as their mother; they feel afraid that the same pattern of being suppressed by a husband might repeat itself.

I wish to become economically independent. I do not wish to go through the same things as my mother, i.e. to stay with someone because you depend on him economically and without him you won’t be able to support your daughters. On many occasions you learn from the mistakes made by relatives and friends and we are aware of the fact that we should avoid repeating their mistakes (10.2:22). Translated from Spanish by Traducit/Åsa Perez
Worth recalling within the context of socialization is what within communication studies we know about the determinative impact of the communicative environment. The family context in which a child and future teenager evolves, influences both the way they experience their need for information, what they consider worth knowing, and their possibilities to realize the experienced need, for example knowledge about available sources of information access, actual access to these sources and, moreover, the requirements to be able to decode, interpret, process and thus take advantage of this information. Provision of information is not only about technology and formal access to knowledge, the so-called mathematical aspect of communication (Shannon/Weaver 1949), but also about accessibility in a wider social, cultural, political and economic sense.

Within the field of political communication, Chaffee et al (1977, p 243 ff) summarize empirical evidence evincing how children growing up in pluralist environments, where open communication and discussion are encouraged, to a greater extent than children from both over-protecting and laissez-faire environments, homes where obedience and social harmony have been the primary concern, develop habits and skills to independently seek and deal with political information and, accordingly, develop political competence. On the basis of acquired empirical experience, there is cause to assume that this observation is valid also within the field of sexual socialization. In the protective family the children are relieved from conflict and from being called into question, and consequently also from knowledge and counter-arguments, which tends to predispose these individuals to become easy victims to persuasion and submissiveness.

Within cognitive psychology there are frequently two recurring ideal types of environment: on the one hand “the socio-oriented” and on the other “the concept-oriented” environment (Chaffee et al, 1973). In the first case, social harmony is rewarded and the child learns to yield to parental authority and avoid conflict. In the other case, questioning, independent thinking and free discussions are encouraged in controversial questions. In a social formation, based on paternalistic authority not to be questioned as a matter of routine, characterized by a dominating rigid religious value system, not least
regarding sexuality and the sacred family as an untouchable basic unit of civilization, openness about sexual issues is not, as we have empirically experienced, to be taken for granted, which is the case in any part of the world, but more so in religious hegemonies. It seems natural to assume that the intervention/establishment of arenas offering the infrastructure for supply and exchange of nuanced, preferably scientifically grounded, sexual knowledge, for example knowledge-institutions like NGOs, mass media and school, will contribute considerably to the development of the sexually knowledgeable, self-determinative, empowered, independent adolescent, able to exert undivided, protective influence over her/his reproductive life. This assumption is further supported by the diffusion of information research that emphasizes the importance of interaction in social groups as an essential requirement for reception and learning (for example Robinsson 1986, p 41).

6.4 DETERMINATIVE FACTORS OF GIRL SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE POWER

Let us once again glance back (see Berglund et al 1997, p 10 ff) upon the map of the main economic, social, psychological and cultural power factors involved in the granting of sexual power to the young woman in Nicaragua, in terms of increasing her possibilities to hold real sway over her own reproductive life. The following, to a large extent interacting, factors are all important prerequisites for both self-esteem and access to the symbolic interface of conceived possible, alternative opportunities, which are so important as a counterbalance to resignation, that is, no way out, a condition which otherwise commonly is dysfunctionally solved by committing oneself to taking care of a man in exchange for cultural acceptance and some social security. They are expressed in interviews in the form of tangible educational aspirations and relatively well-defined plans for the future:

Relative material security

1) Fairly secure family conditions with access to at least someone – except for, preferably, her mother and/or father, for example an
aunt, an uncle, a grandmother or even a neighbour – in whom she confides. That is, confidential and counselling contacts with adults.

2) Either comparatively (liberal/non-orthodox) open-minded, problem-oriented attitudes towards religion, sex and contraception, that is, comparatively independent of traditional authoritative taboos; or very strict and mechanic adherence to traditional, Catholic values regarding sexual continence; or, probably most commonly, a combination/mixture of both.

3) Access to education, information and services, so she can act on attained knowledge concerning body, sexuality, contraception and reproduction.

4) Peer relations that allow cognitive and affective exchanges of knowledge, ideas and support.

5) A trustful communicative relationship with a mother who preferably was not single when first pregnant (see Berglund op cit). That is, the mother must constitute a relatively positive role model, which, however, only partly coincides with the traditional female way and not at all with the submissive part. On the contrary, the submissive type of motherhood constitutes, if anything, a risk factor in this context. In other words, any mother is no guarantee. She must at least to some extent be able to express, introduce and plant faith, aspirations and future plans and hopes in her daughter.

In other words, the need for sexual and reproductive empowerment of the youth in Nicaragua is to a large extent just the self-explanatory synthesis of what we indeed already know about the background of the – in most cases unplanned and in many ways mostly unwanted – adolescent pregnancy. That is, a lack of reproductive control, as for example expressed by the unplanned pregnancy, is above all just another characteristic of poverty (Berglund et al 1997), which in turn means a lack of access to the bases for accumulating social power (Friedmann 1979, p 101; Berglund 1982, p 17ff). Conse-
quentely, access to productive assets, financial resources, health, education, protective networks, personal safety, political organizing, civic information, social services, etc., implies sexual power, and thus constitutes a good protection against early pregnancy as well as sexually transmitted diseases.

Besides the urgent need for, among other things, extended social welfare in general and effective employment generating policies in particular, the empowerment of men in this context is to a considerable extent, on the one hand, about introducing alternative thinking regarding equality of opportunities between men and women and what it is that constitutes masculinity and, on the other hand, about offering moral, cognitive and counselling support to their contra-cultural struggle in opposition to culturally and socially rewarded machismo routines. The activities of CARAS, accounted for in chapter 7, constitute a good example of the latter, as they are conveyors of an alternative cognitive infrastructure regarding human and sexual relations. Early parenthood among young men is of course also a result and a sign of a lack of power, in spite of the fact that becoming a father constitutes a culturally sanctioned attribute of male power. Thus, empowerment is to a very large extent a discursive struggle, as it is about seizing tools for cultural resistance, to counteract health hazardous culture-determined thinking and behaviour patterns, in opposition to dominant naturalized sexual consent and hegemonic truth regimes. That is, sexual empowerment is about promoting:

1) structural conditions for access to the bases for accumulating social power, and
2) the cultivation and diffusion of alternative, oppositional discourses, i.e ways to understand, construct meaning and talk about sex.
**POWER FACTORS**

Reproductive power more than an information problem

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<tr>
<td>Produced by structural conditions and ideological reproduction</td>
<td>Supplied by NGOs, feminist and youth organizations, reproductive health institutions, mass media, social marketing, etc.</td>
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- Poor economic conditions
- Low level of education
- Low self-esteem
- Shallow peer relations
- Unsatisfied need for affection
- Absent fathers
- Strained communication with the mother
- A general lack of close, trusting, confidential and counselling contacts with adults

- Productive assets
- Financial resources
- Social and political organizing
- Education
- Health
- Social services
- Access to media
- Civic information
- Protective networks
- Personal safety
- Straightforward access to contraceptives
- Access to arenas for straightforward reproductive dialogues between women and men

In general terms, sexual power in this account accordingly implies actual control over your own reproductive life in terms of, among other things, knowledge about contraceptive measures, cultural awareness and fair material conditions and, thus, freedom of choice regarding when to have sex with whom and when to become pregnant (compare Hoogland’s work on *Sexual Politics*, 2005).

In this context – although it is not specifically addressed in this report – it is important to be aware of structural and cultural differences between rural and urban areas:
Francis Martinez: In rural areas the custom is to let the sons study, because the parents believe that the daughters only need to know how to take care of the children and the house (how to wash, iron, cook and clean, etc) and knowing that she will be prepared to have a family.

This is why it is common that women from rural areas have children at an early age. In these areas it is practically a tradition to get married at an early age (13 – 16 years old). Also, as a result of the existing macho culture, they consider it wise to have a lot of children and thus many helping hands in the labour. And if a child dies, then the birth of another will replace the lost one. All this contributes to the woman being physically assaulted and reduced to obedience.

In the urban areas the number of women who become pregnant at an early age is lower. This is due to the fact that more of them have access to education. However, in most urban families as well, the mother tries to convince the daughter that she has to know how to do the domestic work in order to keep a good, well-functioning relation to her husband. The mothers wish that their daughters would become more independent than themselves, but they also reason in a macho way saying that their daughters have the obligation to serve their husbands and the domestic issues.

It is worth mentioning that in the rural as well as in the urban areas they teach the boys to cook, clean, wash and all that. Very few mothers are teaching their sons actively, but in most cases it turns out that way when the mother doesn’t have a husband. In those situations the mothers teach their sons that they have to learn in case their future wives leave them or if she perhaps doesn’t know how to do those domestic things (10.3:23).

Translated from Spanish by Traducit/Åsa Perez

6.5 THE PRACTICE OF GIRL SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE POWER

Sexual power in the life of the Nicaraguan teenage girl commonly implies either:
1) to possess the individual capacity, strength, consciousness and integrity necessary in a male-dominated context to make it possible for her to be actively authoritative, governing, in her application of contraceptives in, hopefully self-chosen, intimate relations, or:

2) to refrain from initiating her sexual life until she has succeeded in obtaining some sort of occupation which can save her from economic dependence on a man, and thus make it possible for her to marry for other reasons than just protection and/or survival.

In other words, to most “common” Nicaraguan girls there remains, on the whole, no other “safe” alternative way to exercise power over their life situation in general but to explicitly and consistently say NO to sexual intercourse. This strategy is particularly important if they have aspirations and want to safeguard their path towards independence through education. Slowly, however, this may be changing, in step with augmented self-esteem and increased awareness and access to alternatives.

**Francis Martinez:** I consider that women have limited sexual control and that it’s because of the lack of education. At least I began to take more care after having received sufficient information about how to protect myself from STI. During the workshops at the Club de Conexión I also learned that a woman never, ever should accept to be physically assaulted. Also my mother used to tell us that we should never ever, not by any man, accept being assaulted.

Another aspect that has to do with the ability, for the women, to gain sexual control is that they start considering us as equal and that we have the same rights as a man. Even if we could add other persons’ or organizations’ views to our picture, it is still good if our parents start appreciating us as women and that they teach us that in order to be women we do not have to give in to the men.
From a personal point of view I can say that in my life many things were involved and made me develop into the person I am today, and I consider myself to have a strong sexual control depending on the fact that I respect myself, most important is always my own well-being. I am very open towards my partner and I talk in a direct way to him about sexuality. I tell him what I like and what I don’t like. I act in a serious way with my friends but at the same time I am very open to any conversation about sexuality.

I have set up a lot of economic aims, personal and professional ones, I have learned to keep a strong self-confidence and to respect myself. I believe that the fact that I belong to different groups (dance-group, environment, sexual education groups) has helped me, but it has also been a support to have people around me who like me and wish me the very best.

Until now I have never been forced to give in to the control of a man (apart from my father) and I believe it is because the fact that I from the beginning tell them who I am, what I am like and also the fact that I wanted them to respect my way of thinking. Many of them say that they learned a lot from me and that they discovered that they shouldn’t only think of themselves but also of their partner.

In the beginning it is difficult for a man to deal with women who are open-minded and outgoing. Having conversations within the relationship is important so that they learn to respect us and understand that we have the same rights.

In order to achieve control over one’s sexuality, I believe that it is necessary to have a strong self-confidence, education and information about sexuality and it is also important to feel confident and to have an open communication about sexuality. It is especially important in the contact with parents and partner.

There is one definite key factor needed for women to have success in life and that is that our parents teach us to improve in
every aspect, to learn to like and appreciate ourselves, that they
tell us that we deserve to be happy and that we deserve the best in
the future, and furthermore, that they teach their sons to respect
women. What is important is that society respects men and wo-
men equally (10.3:24). Translated from Spanish by Traducit/
Åsa Perez

6.6 A SCHEMATIC WOMEN’S DISCOURSE-POWER MODEL
As schematised in figure 1, below, the attitudes, perspectives,
approaches and behaviours principally described in chapter 5, can
all be placed, and coordinated among themselves, with reference to
their respective relation to premarital sex on the one hand and cul-
tural rooting on the other.

Let us first look at the upper, fail-safe girl-power section of the verti-
cal, premarital-sex axis. You are definitely protected from unwanted
pregnancies and STDs if you refrain from sex. This applies irrespec-
tive of whether your abstinence mainly is mechanically determined,
by your adherence to traditional, Catholic values, as in the case of
Isabel, or if it is a mainly pragmatic choice based on cultural expe-
rience which makes abstinence the only plausible alternative if you
want to be 100% safe. In this context, traditional, subordinating
views regarding the place and duties of the woman – sustained by
the church in collaboration with conservative political and econom-
ical interests – and more modern approaches, such as the woman’s
self-explanatory right to a career and economic independence – pro-
moted by global culture through mass media, international develop-
ment cooperation programmes, NGOs and popular organizations
– are mutually supportive of each other. In other words, paradoxi-
cally enough, the traditional regulations of the church together with
the values of the cultural establishment in this case offer valuable
support and thus become a progressive force by making/offering/
granting the NO of the girl official legitimacy in accordance with the
ruling system of norms, and thus hopefully making it more under-
standable and acceptable to the urging boyfriend.

But the church does not only prescribe sexual continence but also per-
sists, even if in slightly lighter terms, in opposing the use of so-called
artificial contraceptives. That brings us to the lower left quadrant of the figure, the genuine female high-risk area. The convergence of traditional values regarding for example fertility, conception, motherhood and contraception, with poor access to the bases for accumulating social power, is indeed fatal.

**Power Factors, Cultural Logic, Subjective Rationality and Risk**

- **Power Factors – High; and/or strict adherence to values of abstinence**
  - Cultural conformity = abstinence
  - Traditional value patterns = future mother/señora, guarantee = no sex before marriage
  - Romantic illusory = the evidence of love = risk
  - Romantic assertive = I want to get pregnant (to stay in the relation with the boyfriend) = risk
  - Culturally assertive = I want to know/show that I am fertile, a real woman = risk
  - Shame = does not require active, artificial protection = risk
  - Rational/resigned = I don’t care = risk
  - Indulgent/resigned = at his service = risk
  - Institutionalized male power = domestic violence = risk

- **Sexual Risk - Low**
  - Alternative opportunities = aspirations
  - Modern” value patterns, equality of opportunity = no sex before material independence
  - Pragmatic = a curiosity to know; to enjoy the best moment = risk

- **Power Factors – Low**
  - Sexual Risk - High**
But does that mean that public cultivation of women’s values, as they are represented in for example “Sex and City”, can solve the problem of teenage pregnancies? Let us, at least hypothetically, reflect on to what extent a more intense exposure to global media culture could be regarded as a factor of empowerment.

**Francis Martinez:** The TV-series Sex and the City actually pushed me to become an independent woman and it also made me realise the advantages that come with independence. Still, it is not really the ideal TV series for teaching young people about sexuality. The difference between life in New York and life in Nicaragua is striking and, for example, to us it is a bit promiscuous to have that much sex so freely as those women in the series. So, on the one hand the series is good because the women learn about professional mastering, but on the other hand it is a very abrupt way to teach about sexuality. Besides, they don’t teach about sexuality but about the liberty that women master in order to be able to make decisions in life, and about how women have to stand many things in a macho society (10.3:25). Translated from Spanish by Traducit/Ása Perez

Consider for example shows like “Ricky Lake” and “Jenny Jones”. A question worth considering is to what extent this kind of talk-shows possibly, in a supplementary way, are as important as more traditional program categories (news, documentaries, documentary soaps, fiction) and can function as crowbars of anti-machismo. Even if mass media are, in one way or another on the one hand inevitably a part of the problem regarding the reproduction of stereotyped ways to look upon gender relations, ex-nominating male hegemony, mass media are also, on the other hand, part of the solution, as their selection of contents also contains and nominates problems regarding different faces of gender inequality, sexual harassment, domestic violence, early pregnancies, STDs, etc. In this respect mass media contents do act together with, for example, NGOs, popular organizations, international youth exchange and development collaboration when it comes to wedging apart traditional, repressive sex role patterns. Male power is grounded and reproduced in the traditional, that is, in the lower left box of the figure. Empowerment
and equality of opportunities between the sexes imply the diffusion and rooting of commonly conceived global cultural “immoralities”, to a large extent corresponding to the kind of sexual “knowledge” which “moral panic groups” and traditional public health enlightenment authorities are afraid will take over as the dominating type of sexual information. Instead it is all about the importance of letting fact-founded sexual knowledge be supplemented by not least dramatized and fictional event-based formats. These different categories of information on sexual matters represent different genres and forms of expression and do, accordingly, in collaboration possess tools to reach widely differing target audiences in different contexts and situations and with different types of affective and cognitive dispositions regarding exposure, perception and retention. Different symbolic roads of transmittance stimulate different types of neurotransmitters and, accordingly, have different advantages and a different degree of efficacy of cognitive penetration.

6.7 THE ROLE OF THE MASS MEDIA

6.7.1 Competing Discourses
As already touched upon above, the Nicaraguan mass media constitute a melting-pot of among themselves competing discourses regarding the representation of youth and sex. It is evident that there is a considerable choice of contents and values that contradict and challenge the traditional morals of the church. Generally, in a concentrated form, and on commercial grounds, this material is mostly offered in weekly supplements in at least some of the Nicaraguan daily papers, like Nosotras in La Prensa; Gente in Barricada and Salud y Sexualidad in El Nuevo Diario. Sometimes, as in Sex para todos (Barricada), the contents in these supplements are of foreign origin, produced, for example, in the USA or Spain. However, irrespective of the origin, in these articles, sex games, the G-point and Madonna, etc, are discussed as natural elements of the public sexual conversation. In this perspective we could talk about the role of the media as mediators of oppositional ideas, values and sexual behavioural patterns, towards change that among some parts of the population would be called freedom and multiplicity, and among others would be called moral disintegration.
Undoubtedly – even if nudity and the sexualized female body as a marketing tool, as well as a moral dilemma has always been there to a large extent – parts of the mass media in Nicaragua do visualize and make public sexual attitudes that do not quite support the values of virginity. The supply of pornographic material in the video shops that supplement cable-channels with similar nocturnal contents is of course extremely challenging. In other words, the Nicaraguan society is far from isolated from modern/post-modern mediated narratives of, among other things, the commercialized female body. Cardoso & Império (1994, p 459) describe this process in Brazil in terms of how television participates in …transforming sensitive images of the family, love, sexuality and marriage into a public issue, ….eroticising infancy and adolescence. In other words, the public space of Nicaragua is as permeated by sexualisation as ever any, so called, developed Western country. In fact, implicitly, as a kind of antithesis of the public morals that urge self-restraint and suppression of the communication of sexuality, “everything” is about sex, has a tacit sexual meaning (compare the reasoning by Ekenstam 1993, pp 246-247).

Consequently, there are several, different faces or dimensions of change versus status quo to consider.

Thus, from a feminist theoretical position (Hirdman 2002; 2004a; 2004b; McRobbie 1996; Walkerdine 1996) there is indeed reason also in Nicaragua to entertain some apprehension about the role of media for the social construction of sexual relations in general and the reproduction of female subordination and sexual violence in particular, especially when considering the dominance of machismo values in Nicaragua.

Accordingly, the mass media in Nicaragua also contribute to the reproduction and homogenization of traditional values towards uniformity, conformity and control. This, in turn, implies the importance of paying attention to the processes of interaction and confrontations between the intrinsic meanings of different presentations and contents, within and between different sources of indirect experiences. To what extent and in what ways are there competing
meanings between them, and to what extent and in what ways are they supportive of and dependent on each other?

We want to know in what way, when and under what kind of determining circumstances different kinds of mass-mediated material produce what kind of meanings and what kinds of possible cognitive or behavioural effects among what kind of audiences and in what kind of situations. A first step in such a direction is the work performed by investigators at the Faculdad de Ciencias de la Comunicación, Centro de Investigaciones de la Comunicación (CINCO) and the Fundación Puntos de Encuentro (Abaunza et al, 1995; Solorzano & Abaunza 1994; Rothschuh 1995; Rothschuh & Chamorro 1995; Quesada 1996; Montenegro 1997; 2000).

6.7.2 Symbolic Constructions of Alternatives Make a Difference

Of course it is of absolute importance that messages concerning why and how to practice safe sex are continuously diffused through the mass media. Westoff and Rodríguez (1995) report from Kenya: there is strong statistical association between women’s reports of having heard or seen messages about family planning through various media outlets and their use of contraceptives and their reproductive preferences. In the same way, results from South Africa show that condom use correlates positively with mass media exposure (Katz 2006).

As already touched upon above, however, it seems as if mass media do matter as an important source of empowering building material and not only in terms of more educational, problematizing, articles, TV and radio programs about sex and relations.

My data suggest that heavy viewing, a high degree of interaction with mass media, at least among females, correlates with less apathy, widened curiosity, aspirations, openness to new experiences and symbolic access to alternative systems of meaning and, again, “another” way to look upon yourself and your relation to men, sex, reproductive rights, possibilities of life, etc.

The more you watch “other” programs, the less willing you are to sell out your life. That is, it is not the quantity of programs and arti-
cles about sexuality that counts but the quantity and quality of continuous contact with partly alternative life-styles and possibilities.

At least partly supportive of this notion is the textual analysis by Finlay and Fenton (2005) of scenes in three mainstream films leading to the conclusion that: the films can offer opportunities for the disruption of hegemonic heteronormativity.

An interesting remark in this context is made by Novak and his colleagues (2005) who, among other interesting results concerning factors affecting condom use, found that TV and movie watching as a spare time activity was a significant protective female variable (op cit, p 379).

Telenovelas are popular, especially among women.

...here in Nicaragua at least 90% of the women watch soaps and those who do not maybe can’t because their work does not permit them... (female informant).

Men watch novelas less regularly, except for channel 10, where:

Both men and women watch the soap ”pasión de gavilanes”. This soap takes place in the rural zone and the leading actors live in different farms. It’s a typical soap plot, that is, it is about things that definitely are beyond reality. The Colombian soaps attract the attention of the men. One example was the soap “Betty la fea” ... (ibid).

According to most informants, men predominantly watch sports.

- Women have a more varied taste (ibid).

Interviewed women, but also men, all like Brazilian telenovelas, that is, what they experience as more realistic soap operas that they can recognize and that they can identify themselves with. They like novelas that contain “more poverty”, as at least one informant expresses it.

...When it comes to getting to know things, the soaps enrich more
than the comedies...because the comedies are not designed to make us analyze the scenes. They are only meant to entertain people. However, the soaps make us analyze different situations, observe the different ways of acting of the personalities and we begin to compare the things in the soap with the ones in real life (ibid).

Sometimes you see examples of how you can change your life. For example how you get angry, involved, when you see how women continue with men that are vagrant (vagos) and who abuse... something you watch everyday in the news (ibid).

Another reason for the popularity of Brazilian soap-operas among my informants is expressed in terms of women’s liberty:

...more liberty for the women in the Brazilian soaps. We watch it mostly as a distraction, but ... (ibid).

...the plots of the soaps are often based on real life cases, but up to a certain point they justify that in the end everything ends well, precisely because they are soaps. However, as a televiwer one knows that real life does not always end in happiness... (ibid).

Puntos de Encuentro has since 2002 developed a most valuable and successful multi-method approach, Somos Diferentes, Somos Iguales (SDSI)47, with the objective to build alliances between young people in Nicaragua, and fighting among other things HIV/AIDS, domestic violence and prejudices regarding race, sex and gender. The largest component in this “edutainment” approach has been the national broadcasting of a fictional TV series, Sexto Sentido, a social soap opera featuring among other things the reactions of people around a young man and a young woman who become HIV-positive. Preliminary results from a thorough evaluation of this experience of social communication indicate a large-scale contribution to key aspects of HIV prevention (forthcoming; see Bradshaw & Solorzano 2006 for a comprehensive account of the role of “edutainment” in social change, based on an examination of SDSI).

47 We are Different, We are Equal
7 ADOLESCENT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH EMPOWERMENT IN PRACTICE

7.1 CENTRO DE ATENCIÓN Y RECREACIÓN PARA ADOLESCENTES DE SUTIABA (CARAS)\textsuperscript{48}

7.1.1 Background

In 1988 a group of socially committed, recently graduated physicians, specialists within different medical areas, started to meet, united in their interest in analyzing the problem of adolescent pregnancies which they had experienced in their own hospital HEODRA in León as well as in the rest of Nicaragua. By means of different studies between 1990 and 1992 they developed considerable knowledge concerning critical factors increasing the risk for young women to become pregnant. Among other things, they discovered that the likelihood for early pregnancy increased with, among other variables:

- domestic environments that were disintegrated
- poor socio-economic conditions
- absent parents
- low educational level
- domestic violence
- overcrowded living conditions

\textsuperscript{48} Center of Attention and Recreation for Adolescents of Sutiaba (CARAS). Derived and developed from an original presentation by team Dr García/Dr Williams in appendix I; See also Lindblom 2001 for more details
Typical of adolescents in these environments were:

- low self-esteem
- poor education
- poor sexual education
- a lack of knowledge about contraceptives
- a lack of “life-projects”
- a lack of recreational alternatives

This experience was back-fed to responsible health institutions and authorities in 1993, urging measures to deal with this critical situation. On the basis of obtained consciousness, it was concluded that there was a great need for some kind of organization that could meet the needs of exposed adolescents. In 1994 general counselling was made available for adolescents, and in July the same year Centro de Atención y Recreación para Adolescentes de Sutiaba (CARAS) was constituted (see appendix 10.4).

7.1.2 Vision of CARAS.
In brief terms, the vision of CARAS is about escorting the adolescents in their entire formation, aiming at making them useful to themselves, their family and society, all this in collaboration with their guardians and towards their principal bio-psycho-social needs, in accordance with their environment.

7.1.3 Mission of CARAS
In accordance with the vision, the mission of CARAS is to empower the adolescents regarding their own needs and those of the community, in order that they, their guardians and all of us together, taking into consideration our own means and resources, try to meet these needs by means of feasible and real actions. These activities should be made concrete in every objective of CARAS.

7.1.4 Objectives of CARAS
7.1.4.1 Medical attention
Exclusively for adolescents and youth, CARAS has three types of clinics:
• Medical treatment regarding sexual and reproductive health
• Psychological consulting
• Nurse

Thus, CARAS has services to adolescents regarding for example: family planning, prevention of ETS and HIV/AIDS, prenatal control\textsuperscript{49}, childbirth control, control of R.N. up to 6 months, psycho prophylaxis, promotion of breast feeding, immunizations, prevention of breast cancer and cervical cancer.

7.1.4.2 Juridical attention
Regarding legal issues CARAS works with individuals as well as families and institutions, not least to see to it that families, schools and different institutions comply with legal codes protecting children and youth. Thanks to engaged law students, it is also possible to maintain continuity in personal counseling and to realize legal training regarding legal problems affecting adolescents. To a large extent CARAS, in collaboration with the faculty of law at UNAN-León, shoulder a role as legal advisor for and representative of adolescents. In almost every secondary school in León there exists a group called “adolescents for their obligations and rights” and by means of this group legal issues and problems concerning youth are canalized through CARAS, depending on the type of the problem, if it is civil, penal or criminal cases.

7.1.4.3 Psycho-social education
Among many other themes, CARAS realizes courses regarding: self-esteem, inter-generational communication, sexual and reproductive health, drug prevention, responsible mother and fatherhood and family planning.

7.1.4.4 Recreative Attention
CARAS engages their adolescents in different kinds of sports and has organized teams in baseball, volleyball, basketball and chess. Moreover they work with dancing, theater and painting and they organize dances, film showings and excursions to different parts of Nicaragua.

\textsuperscript{49} See Lindblom 2001
7.1.4.5 *Life Project*

A very important area of activity within CARAS is the collaboration with the adolescents to formulate, concretize and realize life projects that are vital to them, for example finishing primary school, or obtaining scholarships to enable vocational training as carpenter, mechanic, tailor, baker, electrician, hairdresser, beautician, etc.

In cases when someone succeeds in finishing secondary school, CARAS assists in obtaining scholarships or relief from admission fees to make university studies possible, within private as well as public educational institutions.

7.1.4.6 *Social promotion and projection*

This is also a core activity within CARAS. It is considered as very important that its members acquaint themselves with different problematic everyday life situations in which huge segments of people in the Nicaraguan society are situated. Participation is even an indispensable requirement if you want to be a member of CARAS and enjoy the benefits that are offered its youth. Thus, it is obligatory, although in accordance with your own interest and preference, that you support and sponsor at least one of the following groups:

- Children
- Old people
- Pregnant teenagers
- Breast-feeding adolescents
- Teenagers that are about to give birth
- Family planning adolescents
- Illiterate persons
- Adolescents with drug problems

7.1.4.7 *Bio-psycho-social investigations*

CARAS also carries out studies, in collaboration with students of medicine and psychology and future nurses at UNAN-León, about adolescents and related social, psychological and biological problem areas. Every year 3-5 studies are accomplished, to be integrated in the library of CARAS and thus available to all students on all educational levels in León.
7.1.4.8 **Empowerment**

The empowerment area within CARAS is to a large extent constituted by courses in leadership and management. The aim with this training in, among other things, analysis, monitoring and evaluation, is to give these young boys cognitive tools to formulate and fulfill their own objectives and agendas and themselves take charge of their own destiny.

7.1.4.9 **Self-support**

Indispensable to CARAS is maintaining self-support and thus economic independence. This means that funds are scarce, in spite of a continuous struggle for funding from governmental as well as non-governmental institutions. Furthermore, the adolescents of CARAS are constantly organizing different events to collect financial resources.

7.2 **CLUB EN CONEXIÓN (CEC) – YOUTH IN ACTION FOR A BETTER FUTURE**

7.2.1 **Objectives of CEC**

Club en Conexión is basically to be described as a reproductive health project aiming at promoting more responsible behaviour and attitudes among adolescents in Central America. By means of different inter-active methodologies, the project capacitates groups of young trainers, *educadores*, regarding leadership and reproductive health issues. The project also supplies materials and pedagogic instructions and manuals to enable different forms of education activities in schools, organizations and public spaces.

The objectives of the club are

1) to reduce the transmission of HIV and other STDs,
2) to reduce the occurrence of adolescent pregnancies,
3) to delay the initiation of sexual activity,
4) to increase sexual abstinence,
5) to reduce the number of sexual relations among sexually active adolescents,

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50 Club in Connection (CEC) – Jovenes en acción por un futuro mejor
6) to reduce stigmatization and discriminative attitudes, and
7) to strengthen the personal responsibility of adolescents.

7.2.2 Background of CEC
The CEC-project was initiated in 2004 and is financed by different international funds, predominantly the Development Bank of Germany (KfW) and USAID. The project, which is established not only in Nicaragua but also in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, is coordinated and hosted by the Pan American Social Marketing Organization (PASMO) with its regional office in Guatemala. Since 1997 PASMO has been implementing a comprehensive social marketing program for the prevention of HIV/AIDS, mainly by means of marketing the Vive condoms and lubricant, at favourable prices, to high-risk groups such as Commercial Sex Workers (CSW), clients to CSW (e.g. truckers, mobile workers, bar clients, uniformed men), Men Who have Sex with Men (MSM), People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWA) and youth. The aim is to promote increased condom use. Thus, PASMO has developed a significant capacity in the region to design, implement and evaluate integrated prevention activities, including behavior change communications (BCC), condom distribution and promotion, media planning and placement (http://pdf.dec.org/pdf_docs/PDABZ856.pdf). For PASMO, the CEC constitutes an effective instrument to reach adolescents with messages concerning prevention of pregnancies and protection against STDs.

Every club is organized around an internet café, a centre of activities, a radio program, and a structure of groups working with theatre, dancing and sports. Games and inter-active educational activities constitute important means to catch the attention and interest of the adolescents and promote individual reflections regarding information about contraception, health and responsibility.

7.2.3 Organization, Extension and Activities of CEC
In León, the CEC was formed in February 2004 and counted initially 10 educadores trained by the coordinator of the club. These 10 trainers each recruited another 15 members, interested in becoming qualified instructors, and within the first year 150 trainers were promoted. Currently there are 64 active educadores. Some have reached
"the retiring age", that is, become older than 23 years old, while others have formed families, are concentrating on their studies, or have, for different reasons, e.g. economic problems and lack of employment, left León.

Francis Martinez: Many of the educators have abandoned the club due to obligations that they have at home and sometimes due to economic problems that force them to work, and as a result they don’t have the time to continue in the club. Of course they look for a work position that offers a sense of responsibility and challenge in order to advance, just as they were taught at the club. (10.3:26). Translated from Spanish by Traducit/Åsa Perez

In other words, CEC, as well as CARAS, fills up the gap of an unsatisfied need during a period of the maturing adolescent’s life between childhood and manhood, a period of emancipation when you are about to discover certain secrets to be able to take care of your own destiny, when you need access to both friends and fora for exchange and reflection of ideas, myths and narrated truths and cultural consensus. Thus, a lot of teenagers are members of CEC without the cognizance of their parents.

The work of CEC/León covers not only León but also the northern part all the way to the borders of Honduras and El Salvador, for example Cinco Pinos, Posoltega, Chinandega (indirectly El Realejo, Corinto, Somotillo y Chinandega urbana), El Viejo and Nandaime.

At the moment there are about 3000 registered members and it is estimated that approximately 20% of these members are actively participating and, among other things, using the club as a resource and reference centre for searching information and/or as a youth and recreation centre for meeting friends and maintaining social relations with like-minded. In a regular planning/feedback meeting, retroalimentación, slightly more than 30 trainers, 14-23 years old, participate, nearly half of which are female. Many of the trainers do not live in León and others are busy working or, among other things, fulfilling educational requirements regarding practical experience.
So far the visiting and recruiting activities of the club embrace the following quarters of León:

- Sutiava
- William Fonseca
- Enrique Lorente
- San Felipe
- San Carlos
- Villa 23 de Julio
- Guadalupe
- San Juan
- Fundeci
- La Arrocera
- Ruben Dario
- Primero de Mayo
- Villa Democracia
- Calvarito

One of the most important educational activities performed by CEC is constituted by their nine courses, *talleres*, directed towards different institutions, organizations and public spaces where there are adolescents present in different respects. During 2005, the CEC in León has accomplished 377 *talleres* and thus reached about 6000 adolescents with their messages regarding contraceptives, responsibility, non-discrimination and self-esteem. Among other institutions, CEC-León, through their trainers, *educadores*, has succeeded in giving its courses in UNAN-León during the basic year of studies and in the following 16 secondary schools:

- La Salle (Catholic/private)
- San Luis (private)
- Jose Madriz (public)
- Nuestra Senora del Pilar (Catholic/private)
- Lirios de los Valles (private)
- William Fonseca (public)
- Las Mercedes (Catholic/private)
- Cencicomp (private)
- Clarisa Cardenas (public)
• Mariano Barreto (public)
• Tecnico la Salle (Catholic/private)
• Calasanz (Catholic/private)
• Centro Escolar Sutiava (public)
• Reparto Adiac (public)
• Politecnico de Occidente (private)
• INTAE (private)

In other words, CEC has gained access to the education spaces of private as well as public, religious and independent schools.

Another important sphere of educational activities of CEC consists in their reproductive health capacitation of adolescents within other NGOs such as:

• Desafios
• Vision Mundial (Posoltega)
• ALFASOL
• ASODEL
• Hermanas Mercedarias (Quezalguaque)
• Red Cross

7.2.4 Pedagogy and Educational Content

Normally, two educators work together in accordance with a thoroughly elaborated manual, by means of a sophisticated composition of different pedagogical and group dynamic techniques and materials. Among other things, their battery of materials include: card games, wall charts, plates, photographic illustrations, dildos, condoms, tape-recorders, videos, data shows.

In very brief terms, the nine courses consist in the following components:

1) **Surviving adolescence.** Aiming at identifying the challenge of being adolescent while integrating exercises in auto-communication and expression.

   a) *I would like to present…* Learning to know the other participants and to give a presentation.
b) **Emotions, fears and frustrations.** About the changes that occur in the life of a teenager and the impact of hormones during puberty.

c) **Playera Mia.** About factors influencing our self-esteem.

d) **Only tell me the truth.** Recognizing myths and reality concerning various sexual themes.

2) **What is happening to me?** Introduces the biology of puberty and sexuality inclusive of scientific concepts and terminology.

   a) **Popular language.** Aiming at increasing the knowledge of the scientific terminology of sexuality and to remove shame when talking about sex straightforwardly and scientifically.

   b) **The lottery of reproductive biology.** Gives basic knowledge about anatomy, physiology and reproduction.

   c) **Surviving puberty.** Acquiring knowledge about the reality of puberty by means of socio-dramas about changes that occur during puberty.

3) **Sexually Transmitted Diseases!** Aiming at a diffusion of knowledge about STDs and related themes.

   a) **The poker game of chance and danger.** Card game (100 cards) to learn how fast STDs can be transmitted and the importance of getting to the clinic for treatment.

   b) **Jeronimo.** Assessing levels of risk for STD depending on behaviour and sexual activities.

   c) **Socio dramas:** “The dilemma of communicating STDs”. Understanding the importance of talking about STDs. Not least to inform partners and go to the clinic when someone has caught a STD.

4) **Talking about HIV/AIDS.** Aiming at increasing the knowledge amongst the participants about HIV/AIDS and related themes.

   a) **Understanding the vocabulary of HIV/AIDS.** An introduction of the most important concepts through a card-game.

   b) **HIV/AIDS in our world.** A presentation of epidemiological aspects of HIV and its global effects.

   c) **Looking at the transmission of HIV/AIDS.** Looking into how fast HIV can propagate itself and how to stop it. This exercise
also illustrates the process of taking specimens after possible exposure and also addresses the problem of discrimination.

d) **HIV/AIDS interview or testimony.** Aiming at reflecting knowledge and attitudes regarding HIV/AIDS.

5) **Me and contraceptives.** Presents reliable information about family planning, the prevention of unplanned pregnancies and STDs, inclusive of HIV.
   a) **Contraceptive methods.**
   b) **A customary story.** Aiming at introducing the concepts of sexual risk-taking and consequences. Animate the participants to think about how to behave in everyday situations that can change their whole life.
   c) **The circle of confidence.** Aiming at learning how to apply the condom in a correct way and to discuss the reasons for not using a condom. Women as well as men.
   d) **A visit to the clinic.** Aiming at getting the participants acquainted with the services available at the health centre and its routines.

6) **Engagement and love.** Aiming at strengthening the concepts of mutual fidelity and the self-esteem of the participants within a teenage love relation.
   a) **Who knows….**
   b) **Love and falling in love.** Aiming at reflecting “falling in love” as a transitory phenomenon and strengthening self-esteem.
   c) **Elements of the heart.** Aims at learning to identify the essential elements of love relations and why they matter.
   d) **The sexual roles we play.** Aiming at a better understanding of gender and the role and impact of machismo in society.

7) **Taking care of my sexuality.** Aiming at strengthening the capability of the participants to make decisions regarding their sexuality, and to consider possible consequences.
   a) **The rooster sings that…** Aiming at getting to know the participants and different themes related to how to take care of oneself sexually.
b) **Skills for life.** Aiming at introducing the theme of different forms of abuse and different ways to say “no” to sex and strengthening self-esteem. Understand methods to always act with responsibility and self-esteem.

c) **Only you decide when.** Aims at understanding sexual debut as an important personal decision. Practicing how to make unforeseen decisions in difficult, awkward situations and understand the consequences.

8) **Acquiring new responsibilities.** Aims at strengthening the capability of the participants to make decisions in their lives, firmly and with responsibility.

a) **The boats.** Learning how to take responsibility for more than just yourself.

b) **The album of memories.** The participants remember past experiences, and imagine the future in order to reflect on the impact of their decisions.

c) **To make decisions in life.** To present, taking narratives as a point of departure, the consequences of different decisions.

9) **Discrimination and Human Rights.** Aiming at reducing discrimination and stigmatization (among the participants) regarding minority groups such as persons living with HIV/AIDS and to introduce the concepts of human rights.

a) **The human knot and universal human rights.** About how to loosen up knots through collaboration. Develop the meaning of teams and the understanding of the connection between all human beings.

b) **Chones minoritarios.** About depreciatory, pejorative namings and how you look differently on things depending on group affiliation. Aiming at understanding group dynamics, why groups are being formed and what it is to be outside the group or discriminated against (interchangeable with c).

c) **Pruiy missing.** All participants blindfolded but must find Pruuy. About how it feels to be outside the group and/or discriminated against. Moreover, to learn how prejudices are cultivated when information is lacking (interchangeable with b).

d) **Discrimination affects us all.** Aiming at a better understanding of how discrimination affects society.
7.2.5 Other educational activities performed by CEC
They also have stands and exhibitions on fairs and markets, where they display and, with interested visitors, play different informative games regarding reproductive health. During 2005, CEC-León participated in 5 fairs and presented their informative stand on 12 different occasions. CEC also arranges open film shows, cineforos, at the club, showing quality pictures touching upon different relevant themes concerning social problems, sexuality and reproductive health. Among others movies, the club has shown: *Philadelphia; Forrest Gump; Thirteen (Trece)*. During 2005 there were 95 cineforos realized at the club.

7.2.6 Club en Conexión from Inside
Let us round off this chapter with Francis Martinez’s experiences from her engagement in CEC:

Francis Martinez: *To the kind of teenager I was, not very sociable, insecure, timid, shy, this experience of voluntary work at the Club en Conexión has so far been the most rewarding thing I have done.*

*First of all this is due to the fact that in order to belong to the club the only requirement is your interest in working with the young people. Later you will, during almost four months, attend training on how to work with young people and in that way to develop what you have learned.*

*While having these lessons, we, the new educators, are trained in the handling of the groups through different dynamic structures. And that is what helps the teenagers in developing a capacity to interact in groups, and it also makes the young person more self-confident.*

*Apart from learning how to socialize with the young people, I also learned about the living conditions that mark the very poor people, and I also understood why teenagers still become pregnant, though there are so many organizations working to put an end to that.*
Especially when it comes to this, I used to think that the girls became pregnant because they wanted to, since the method of family planning by that time was something known to everyone. But later I observed that, in reality, it wasn’t like that at all.

Through television, radio and other means of communication we are often informed that the use of contraceptives is the most common thing to do. But in actual fact they do not come close to the person to tell him or her in a direct way, with delicacy and discretion, why it is necessary to use methods of family planning.

Many times we reason that since we understand, the rest will also do the same, but the truth is that it is not the case. All that depends on how we have been raised by our families, the confidence the parents have felt in talking about sexuality, and the degree of importance that the educational system in Nicaragua gives to it is not good.

Since childhood our parents and society teach us that men and women are born to reproduce themselves, and they also let us know that it is a sin to have sexual pleasure. To me it was even somewhat confusing to get to know these things about sexuality, because there were moments when I felt a kind of conflict between what I had been told since I was very young and the new things that I was now learning.

That is why I think that those at Club en Conexión have a good methodology to work with young people, that is, through a lot of groups of participation and through the use of educational games (something that young people are very interested in). When they have attended at least two workshops they are invited to a cinematographic forum to analyze different situations from educational films where they present sexually transmitted diseases, drug abuse, violence within families, etc.

One has to admit the fact that each time you start off with new groups it is difficult, because in the beginning the young participants will consider the workshops a game, something good that
implies that they, during one hour, stay free from other subjects (one hour is the time limit that some schools give to this theme, and the workshops). However, as we enter deeper into the theme they change and they become more objective to having these workshops.

In a personal way I give them a particular experience. Once when we were giving these workshops at the Instituto Nacional de Ocidente (INO), in the beginning the young students considered the workshops a kind of game, they didn’t pay attention, they made fun of it, but after a while, through the different activities they became more and more interested in the themes we put up. Afterwards, many of them came to us to talk about their worries and doubts about the best planning methods, about how to tell their boyfriends that they are not yet ready to have a sex and other situations.

Yet another thing that proves how the Club influenced me in my life is the way I interacted with my classmates. I had become more sociable in my contact with them and during the breaks I used to teach some educational games to some of them, and they began to ask me about different things. By and by, some of them learned to change their way of speaking about sex. (Previously, many of them considered sex something vulgar and they expressed it in that way, but after some time they realized that it is a natural part of life and that it was something they could discuss in confidence together with their partners.)

And I personally turned into a more self-confident person. I became less vulnerable to the pressure and psychological abuse that some boys use when it comes to sex (that is, if I do not have sex with him it is because I do not want that). To me the true independence came with a sense of freedom and trust in my own sexuality, to be able to, convincingly, say to my partner whether I want to be together with him or not. That means, according to me, even more than economic independence, because that kind of independence is something I might achieve by being a hard-working student or employee, but the confidence, the indepen-
dence in my sexual behavior, to not feel guilty for having sex with my boyfriend, that is something that would have been difficult to achieve without the experience from my work with sexual health and all the training I had the possibility to attend.

One of the most difficult things that I have met in my work at the Club is the fact that society, many times, doesn’t consider our projects positive activities, since they feel that we promote the emancipation among young people. Religion is another problem, since it affects the educational system, and it makes it less probable that the schools would accept that we organize the workshops. This is especially the case in the religious schools.

Another difficulty is the economic capacity of the project and the fact that it was going to respond to applications from other projects. That is, the budget only covered a determined number of monthly activities. However, we, the young ones, were ready to work more, but to do that we needed funds. By that I refer to the expenses when moving around to different regions and the expenses for meals. In order to keep up long-term teaching and contact with the young ones instead of just leaving them alone with what they have just learnt, it is also necessary to include the activities at the Club, to let their experiences and learning spread to others.

Well, in short, I believe that is what I could tell about my work at the Club en Conexión (10.3:27). Translated from Spanish by Traducit/Ása Perez
8 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 THE SOCIO-CULTURAL LOGIC AND SUBJECTIVE RATIONALITY OF SEXUAL RISK-TAKING

8.1.1 The Illogicality of Reproducing the Social Problems We Have the Knowledge to Control

Is it not up to the individual to take responsibility for his/her own life and the consequences of performed activities? How can sexual risk-taking behaviour be culturally and socially constructed and thus become socio-culturally logical in a global society where “everybody” – government, non-governmental organizations and religious, educational and health institutions, among other social actors, not least researchers – on their agenda prioritize efforts to control what is behind sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and unwanted pregnancies and, accordingly, their negative health and social consequences? How can it be that global society itself, through its political-economic structures and meaning production processes, constantly reproduces the very problems, such as poverty, gender inequality, child labour, trafficking, pregnancy-related deaths, drug and sexual abuse, domestic violence, etc, it is fighting against? Isn’t that illogical?

Because, at least scientifically, irrespective of the discipline of the journal, there is indeed a total consensus regarding, for example, women’s self-explanatory rights to sexual and reproductive health. There is also political consensus, at least as this matter expresses itself in the programme of action from the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994 and UN Declarations
and Conventions in general. Nevertheless, unsafe sex today constitutes the second most important risk factor for disability and death in the least developed countries of the world. Around 45 million out of 80 million unwanted pregnancies result in abortion every year, and 340 million people catch some kind of STD (Glasier et al 2006b, p 1595).

For some, probably symptomatic, reason, the call for sexual and reproductive health was omitted from the Millennium Development Goals and now, 14 years after Cairo, international funding and promotion of family planning has decreased, and the call from Cairo remains an unfinished agenda (Cleland et al 2006, p 1810). How can that be, considering for example that family planning has proven to be:

...unique among medical interventions in the breadth of its potential benefits: reduction of poverty, and maternal and child mortality; empowerment of women by lightening the burden of excessive childbearing; and enhancement of environmental sustainability by stabilising the population of the planet (ibid).

In the same way, Bygdeman and Lindahl (1994, p 27) were somewhat puzzled that successful policies to reduce maternal mortality caused by illegal, medically unsafe and dangerous abortions in Sweden during the seventies enjoyed such a limited power of attraction at the population conference in Mexico City in 1984, in spite of their documented efficiency and the absence of functional alternatives. They were especially puzzled in the light of the UN declaration on human rights from Teheran (1968) concerning the right of men and women to decide freely on the number and spacing of their children, and the UN declaration from 1969 concerning the obligation to provide families with the knowledge and means necessary to enable them to exercise this right. In other words, the issue of control of unsafe sex is not about a lack of knowledge or of official, international recognition of the problem as such, but about the distribution, application and reproduction of power.

Why, then, neglect the global duty of promoting sexual and reproductive health through extensive investments in, at least, large-scale
sexual education, inclusive of controlling sexual prejudices, misconceptions and shame, as well as providing far-reaching access to the whole spectrum of available contraceptives and adherent counselling? Especially since this strategy would most likely check the pandemic of unsafe abortions considerably. Grimes and his colleagues (2006, p 1908) estimate that 19-20 million unsafe abortions are effected every year, out of which 97 % in developing countries. Is it not astonishingly stupid and illogical, in the name of sexual and reproductive health, to both circumscribe the possibilities of especially women to secure their possibilities to plan their reproductive lives by means of thorough knowledge and access to contraceptives, and, simultaneously, restrict their access to medically safe abortions? The treatment of complications due to unsafe abortions constitutes a heavy burden on public health systems while an abortion within the medical system is both cost effective and one of the safest procedures in contemporary medical practice. In other words:

- ...deaths due to unsafe abortion are arguably the most preventable of all maternal deaths (Glasier 2006a, p 1550);
- ...sexual and reproductive health for all is an achievable goal (Fathalla et al 2006, p 2095);
- ...Denial of sexual and reproductive rights is a preventable cause of death. The causes are power, politics and poverty (Shaw 2006, p 1943).

All the above cited researchers establish the problem and note its link to traditional, conservative, ideological and religious forces and the adherent political agenda, inclusive of the “gag” rule (http://www.globalgagrule.org/). The present study of Nicaragua illustrates this process empirically.

*The increasing influence of conservative political, religious, and cultural forces around the world threatens to undermine progress since 1994, and arguably provides the best example of the detrimental intrusion of politics into public health* (Glasier 2006b, p 1595).

Cleland and his colleagues (ibid) describe the dilemma in terms of missing political willingness, but is it really that simple? From time immemorial mankind has fought against poverty, while the mecha-
nisms of exploitation of human and natural resources have become more and more ingenious, refined and efficient – all this concurrently with adherent discursive processes (see chapter 2), through which the theoretical visibility, in people’s minds, inclusive of researchers and politicians, of the basic determinants of impoverishment, has become undermined and obscured, dismissed as ideological bias.

Thus, within international politics it is still possible to formally fight global poverty without challenging its basic causes, which naturally are above suspicion within the hegemonic neo-liberal discourse. So, it is not really about issues that have been forgotten (Glasier 2006a, p 1550). Rather, it is about a lack of consciousness that we are all part of certain truth systems, and from a certain discursive perspective of naturalized knowledge, apprehend a certain policy as more self-explanatory than another.

It is apparent that contemporary, predominant, neo-liberal understanding of why poverty and unsafe sex persist, and even in some instances grow worse, is not sufficiently challenged by antagonistic social conflict theoretical knowledge, which links both persisting poverty and the unsatisfying reproductive health situation to the basic conflict between work and capital, as expressed in, for example, the unequal distribution of resources and power. Thus, when we understand the mechanisms behind poverty and its socio-sexual consequences, it becomes logical, but unfortunately not even then self-evidently, and as a matter of course, taken care of – as we are dealing with both deeply rooted religious power structures and extremely powerful political economic forces trying, in the name of global development, to maximize profits irrespective of their social or environmental costs. Accordingly, the current issue is not so much about a lack of knowledge or political willingness, but rather about the struggle between different orders of knowledge, which each prescribes different remedies as a manifestation of its power and thus reproduces its power and knowledge. From a consensus theoretical point of view, the problem of impoverishment does not make sense only as a temporary disturbance within the system, which can be dealt with politically and, accordingly, controlled. It is just there and just needs to be taken care of to maintain stability and “current
order”, inclusive of the prevailing distribution of privileges. From a conflict theoretical perspective, it makes perfect sense as the self-explanatory consequence of economic exploitation.

8.1.2 Theoretical Retrospect

Thus, the problem with persisting social problems, resistant to usual antibiotics, due to apparently toothless strategies, does to a large extent have to do with a lack of consciousness about, or maybe more accurately expressed, a lack of conceptual tools, knowledge and discursive frames of references, necessary to make possible the identification and nomination of the basic causes of the problem. That, and how the problem is structurally determined, is not, as a matter of course, discursively visible. It is as if “we” perceive social problems as being planted in our world, by some sort of invisible and untouchable spiritual authority, as something inevitable, normal and natural, not as something we are implicated in as co-producers. Is that why “we”, our authorities, or who really, persist in trying to combat global social, economic and environmental problems without touching their basic causes? Yes, at least in part. As touched upon in the theoretical introduction (chapter 2) it is through the cultural processes of meaning production, representation through language, that social problems, processes of impoverishment, class, gender, race and other categories of inequality, etc, are being naturalized, and their underlying causes, as well as the connection between different kinds of inequalities, as a matter of the hegemonic knowledge/power logic, are made invisible, or at least obscure. In this way, social problems are continuously being reproduced, but also, thanks to the constant presence of co-existing, competing, discourses, evolving new forms and partly relieved by remedial measures.

That is more or less what it is all about. We perceive, construct, give meaning, understand and act towards the world in different ways, depending on the degree of self-interest and on different degrees of access to different orders of knowledge in different socio-economic, religious, cultural and national contexts. Hence, there is no neutral, objective, impartial knowledge or truth to rely on. Knowledge as a resource on the basis of which we create our reality, our own truth-effects, and orient ourselves in the world, is more or less always,
in one way or another, linked to economy and politics. Structural conditions impact on, not to say determine, our possibilities to exert power over our own lives. At the same time we are, as enrolled in the predominant discourse, “voluntarily”, in our relative unconsciousness about socio-cultural integration processes, partaking in the everyday reproduction of these very conditions. Luckily enough, we are also members of oppositional knowledge systems and hence, to different degrees, part of the continuously ongoing slow change, and hopefully relief, of the same conditions. In short, social, economic, cultural and political structures are compelling – however not immune to change, but exposed to resistance through antagonistic antithesis knowledge, oozing forth in the breaches of structural shortcomings, undermining the authority of the ruling thesis.

8.1.3 The Compelling Constructions of “Common Sense” by Means of Socio-Cultural Reward

Thus, the keywords in this context are spelled “normalization” and “naturalization”. As soon as something, a phenomenon, a rule, a creed, a cause, and so forth, acquires status as more or less true, and its links to historical, economic, political antecedents and thus power/knowledge, have faded, it becomes established as a cultural agreement and starts consolidating itself by a sanction system through which individual behaviour is rewarded or punished towards standardization of common sense. In this way, processes of normality production produce risk. For example, poverty is indirectly reproduced through the blurring of its basic causes towards naturalness, and in this way the phenomenon as such, symbolically, as, for example, as expressed in the Millennium Development Goals, becomes accessible to remedial concern without disturbing/challenging the prevalent global economic and political power order.

In a similar way, some of the conditions paving the way for sexual risk-taking behaviour in Nicaragua are produced by competing orders of naturalization. As we have experienced throughout the analysis of the empirical data above, there are above all two major sexual ideal type paradigms intertwined in the everyday lives of the Nicaraguan adolescents. Both push, through the cultural superstructure, their reason as supporting pillars of civilization. As introdu-
ced in chapter 4, the basic dividing principle in their antagonism is about the contents and the resulting effects of the way meanings of gender and reproductive rights are constructed. However, if the value systems intrinsic in both discourses cherish domestic peace, stable families and safe sex, how come that unsafe sex in practice is produced by cultural common sense, made explicit through rules, upheld by rewards and punishments, compelling individuals to certain, rewarding, socio-culturally “rational”, even if also materially determined, behaviours?

Let us, as a point of departure, go back to (see p 24) Caplan’s (1987/1995, p 25) wording: What people want, and what they do, in any society, is to a large extent what they are made to want, and allowed to do.

If adolescents in Nicaragua in their sexual practice had only done what they were allowed to do in accordance with predominating religious values and instruction, if there had been no resistance from discourses challenging Catholic hegemony, if the virginity rule had prevailed, there would in principle be no sexual relations, and consequently no pregnancies, before marriage, and, accordingly, no arenas for becoming infected with STDs.

In the same way, if adolescents in Nicaragua in their sexual practice had only done what they were allowed to do in accordance with the instructions for safe sex pursued by women’s organizations, adolescent NGOs and youth clinics in Nicaragua, there would be no unprotected sexual intercourse, and, consequently, no space for diffusion of STDs and in principle no unplanned pregnancies.

Neither of these ideal type situations has, most likely, ever been real in human history, and probably never will, not even in the most totalitarian religious or atheist system or national formation.

There are of course many different reasons why not even totalitarian Catholic rule, in spite of its valuation of virginity, fidelity, family and so forth, would solve the problem with unsafe sex in Nicaragua, or any other country. One obvious reason consists of the non-questio-
ned, naturalized, taken-for-granted, patriarchal order, on which the Catholic Church, as most religious systems, is founded. This discursive order explicitly carries different expressions of in-built gender inequality, involving among other things traditional gender roles, abnormalization of homosexuality, discouragement of artificial contraceptives, and the deprivation of the woman’s dominion of her body and reproductive health through the banning of both the use of artificial contraceptives and the right to free abortion. Hence, unsafe sex naturally becomes a natural consequence of predominating cultural knowledge and a natural part of everyday life. Decisions that in themselves convey risks for life-long suffering, especially for women, are culturally and socially rewarded and sustained:

- Early fatherhood is informally, culturally rewarded as an incontestable proof of virility and normality, that you are a man.
- Fertility, motherhood, and thus even early pregnancy, are culturally rewarded as incontestable evidence of normality, that you are a woman, even if early pregnancy is morally condemned and formally negatively sanctioned as a religious contravention.
- As a woman, you are not, as a matter of course, expected to be armed with condoms as opposed to men, but risk being labelled as loose.
- As a woman, you are not, as a matter of course, culturally “allowed” to determine measures of birth control by yourself without the consent of your husband.
- Artificial contraceptive measures are not traditionally encouraged.
- As a woman, you are not allowed control over your own body in terms of a legal right to abortion.

Just for the record in this context, I think it is important to remember that the problem of culturally consolidated gender inequality, as one major core-cause behind sexual risk-behavior, is far from confined to Nicaragua or Catholic nations, but is a global problem (see 1.3). Both Türmen (2003) and Wood et al (1998) show how gendered violence and sexual coercion constitute an altogether too common feature of the distorted power relations between men and women, which limit the possibility of the woman to negotiate safe sex in her
domestic relationship. As in the case of poverty, this global evil is officially recognized in international decrees, but quite neglected in practical political action by the authorities. How much more knowledge is really needed to take the consequences of the obvious?

To put the matter in a nutshell, as men and women in a patriarchal society have sex for different reasons and are awarded human value for different qualities:

...sexuality in a male-dominated society inevitably involves danger for women (Caplan op cit, p 9).

8.1.4 Structural Conditions and the Sociology and Psychology of Sexual Risk-Taking

Few studies seem to be able to escape the recognition of the determinative impact of structural conditions on both attitudes to sex and the level of risk-taking behavior. Often this liaison is mediated through the occurrence of other social problems, produced by political and economic processes, as factors increasing the risk of the practice of unsafe sex.

In her search for reasons behind sexual risk taking, among Chlamydia-positive and HIV-tested young men and women in Sweden, Christianson (2006, p 67) mentions homelessness, economic hardship, forced sex, selling sex, legal troubles, high rates of substance use, and limited familial support, especially concerning contact with their fathers, as health-threatening conditions. Accordingly, she concludes, in line with the core reasoning throughout the present text, that a devastating socio-economic and neglectful psychosocial milieu can harm the development of a responsible behavior. Among HIV-positive youth, Christianson et al (2006) found a consistent pattern of difficulties during childhood (p 6). Especially this point, regarding the importance of fairly secure family conditions and preferred adult presence (see 6.4), constitutes a frequent core intermediate variable which predisposes affected children to future health disadvantages of different kinds, including reproductive health. Among many others, Laufer (1976) confirms the correlation between a lack of good contact with one or both parents and early pregnancy.
As indicated in stories of less fortunate adolescent girls in Nicaragua (sections 5.2 and 5.4.) there are also some streaks/traits of psychological rationality in self-destructive behavior. Tourigny (1998) presents an illustration of this phenomenon in her study of African American youth in inner-city Detroit, who despite-or because of-their daily confrontation with the pain and suffering of at least one AIDS-afflicted family member, deliberately sought HIV exposure (p 149). Tourigny’s study, including her references, makes up a considerable concrete testimony of how poverty-generating economic policies, and consequent feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness and futility among its victims, produce correlated, mutually aggravating, risk behaviors like gang membership, drugs, crime, etc. Not surprisingly, safe sex is not a priority in environments where criminality, use of drugs and alcohol are a daily routine (Christianson op cit, p 64). In Nicaragua too, you could in some cases of early pregnancies and HIV-exposure, talk about a desperate celebration of suffering, as Bourgois (1996, p 256) expresses his empathy for vulnerable inner-city citizens. It is not likely that this type of socio-economic starting-point favors the kind of self-confidence and aspiration thinking needed to make you develop an alternative rationality and invest in yourself. Rather, it makes you more disposed to take a chance (see section 5.4).

On the basis of comprehensive experiences of the adolescent sexuality and the psychological development of the adolescent girl, gynecologist Karin Edgardh and psychologist Karin Crafoord (Edgardh 1988) further elucidate these mechanisms, and thus also some of the empirical data displayed in chapter 5. How can we understand destructive sexuality (op cit, p 103 ff)?

In many cases, a girl’s mismanagement of her sexuality, as Crafoord expresses it, can be considered as a cry for help, a bodily expression of mental pain caused by, for example, the consequences of disturbed family relations and concurrent unappeased craving for affection and love (see Berglund 1997 et al). As also experienced empirically in this study and confirmed in many studies (see op cit), girls that are victims of abuse and early pregnancy are daughters to women with a similar history. This is also confirmed by Salazar
Torres (2007), among others. Furthermore, it is far from uncommon that adolescent girls have been sexually abused when very young without anywhere to go with their shame and pain, without access to any reliable adult, anyone to talk to. A lack of social support thus constitutes a core risk-factor, and denied emotional distress calls for compensation, easily, and comparatively naturally, realized through disadvantageous sexual encounters. As stated in section 6.4, a confident, safe, supportive relation to a wise and empathic adult constitutes a huge protective force, confirmed by Craaford (Edgardh 1988, p 106) and Salazar Torres (op cit).

A firmly established experience within psychiatric youth care is that girls with complex syndromes of self-destructive behaviors like suicide attempts, drug abuse and promiscuity, often have been sexually abused during their childhood and adolescence. In other words, destructive sexuality is a constituent of a wider, to a large extent, structurally determined complex of problems (op cit, p 101), an expression of both mental and social distress (p 103).

More than once in my interviews, adolescents, young mothers or future mothers, sometimes, astonishingly enough concurrently with a developed consciousness about the hardships of motherhood and its hampering effect on their possibilities to be in charge of their own life, explicitly expressed their wish to have a child and to become a mother. Possibly, this could be a combination of, on the one hand, a longing for the culturally rewarded career as mother and *ama de casa*, and on the other hand, an expression of the yearning to be, herself, the object of motherly care, which is confused with a desire to take care of a baby.

*The fantasy does not differentiate between the active and the passive but the girl hopes, by giving what she wants, to receive it herself* (op cit, p 109).

Eventually, when the adolescent mother passes her child over to her mother, this conduct, according to Craaford (p 110) also satisfies a yearning in relation to the mother. By letting her mother care for her baby she indirectly experiences the attention she did not enjoy.
herself as a child. Obviously, as we are over and over again coming back to the strong causal relation between the craving to be cuddled and the exposure to risky sexual encounters, unsafe sex is the consequence of a psychologically rational response to unsatisfied needs for affection. Our inner child craves physical contact, touch and being touched (p 113).

Thus, this kind of destructive sexuality constitutes both an expression of unsatisfied need for motherly care and revenge for the deprivation of it (p 112). Accordingly, the intercourse becomes an act through which the girl hopes to gain something, but not a relation between two equal partners (p 108), as empirically elucidated by Salazar Torres (2007).

On the basis of their compilation of sexual behavior data from 59 countries, Welling et al (2006, p 1716) conclude, confirming the line of reasoning above, that:

*Poverty, deprivation, and unemployment work with gender relations to promote change of partner, concurrency, and unprotected sex. Economic adversity restricts the power of men and women to take control of their health; ...*

### 8.1.5 Where There Is Power, There Is Resistance

For these obvious reasons, the dominating religiously enclosed discourse in Nicaragua, which still to a major extent regulates the framing of sexual relations and reproductive health policies, carries within itself the seeds of its own impairment, a built-in, latent rupture in the system, inviting attacks from oppositional orders of discourse, corresponding, for example, to the agenda of global women’s movements for equal rights, opportunities, salaries and the right to decide over their own body, their own sexuality and reproductive life, against sexual permissiveness, abuse and domestic violence. As stated above, most variations of sexual public reason can be traced back to these two antagonistic ideal type discursive communities.

The relative absence of a problematizing attitude in Nicaragua towards traditional ideas of gender and sexuality, and the more
or less natural positive sanctioning of male power in general and machismo in particular, constitute a kind of antithesis of the basic commandment of love, which creates vacant spaces for competing logics and rationalities, the reason for equal sexual and reproductive rights, to infest.

This situation provides, as illustrated both by Nicaraguan and Swedish cases (touched upon in the following sections), a platform for discursive struggle and possible change. What is needed are concerned agents, reasonably equipped with discursive input from alternative knowledge systems, to fill these vacant spaces, and in possession of necessary material resources allowing them to exert power over their situation and, accordingly, make decisions in favor of their own well-being. If they are not in possession of, i.e. do not have access to, the sufficient bases for accumulating power (see sections 1.3.3; 6.4), they are to a higher extent, as Caplan (1987/1995, p 25) writes, made to want, although not as a result of conspiratorial, planned, communication but as a consequence of the contents of social and cultural integration and compelling material conditions. Different forms, faces and expressions of poverty obstruct the realization and diffusion of sexual and reproductive rights and remain, as repeatedly manifested above and below, the most determining underlying cause of human conduct producing sexual and reproductive health disasters.

8.2 UNDERSTANDING THE MECHANISMS OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE EMPOWERMENT

8.2.1 A Study in Interaction between Base and Superstructure

As recurrently revealed during the present study, the task of trying to explain the mechanisms of sexual and risk-taking behaviour provides no escape from not considering the impact of structural conditions and the interaction between political-economic circumstances and socio-cultural reason as it, for example, expresses itself in attitudes and policies regarding the promotion of sexual and reproductive health.
To increase the pedagogic potential of the discussion in this section, I will, as a frame of reference, now and then make use of the history of reproductive health policies and of experiences gained regarding the work and the varying success of different variables set into motion in the struggle to control sexuality and reproductive health in Sweden. In this way, mechanisms, processes, meanings and causalities involved in the promotion of reproductive rights and health become more visible.

The basic, ideal type, discursive conflict presented in chapter 4, regarding the meaning of sexual and reproductive rights and how to procure reproductive health, globally expresses itself in relatively similar ways, and has done so historically, too. Thus, the Swedish process just constitutes a reference point in relation to which it is easier to understand the universality of what is going on in Nicaragua.

Taking the Swedish situation as a point of departure does, however, not in any way imply that Swedish authorities have succeeded in developing the perfect formula for how to control sexual risk-taking behavior. Far from it.

8.2.2 Sexual and Reproductive Rights Are a Matter of Power and Must Be Conquered

The situation briefly presented above, in section 8.1.5, is, at this very moment, the reality in Nicaragua, while challenged by, among others, the women’s rights movement and NGOs addressing urgent youth issues. Thus, the current struggle in Nicaragua for power over the woman’s body and reproductive life, which I have described now and then in the text, contains more or less the same ingredients as the situation in Sweden, i.e. both the problems of today and of yesterday, both before and after the reforms and change of laws during the seventies that recognized, at least symbolically, the common sense of equal gender rights as a result of many decades of a gradually growing resistance through the production and diffusion of alternative, oppositional knowledge. In other words, women’s right to decide over their own bodies and children’s right to be wanted still remain to be finally won, and the rights achieved are not auto-
matically granted for ever but have to be won over and over again in the everyday discursive struggle. Sexual and reproductive health is a function of equal sexual and reproductive rights, which are a function of equal gender rights and, thus, a function of the success of women’s movements.

8.2.3 The Indispensability of Enlightenment

Under any circumstances, the promotion of extended sexual and reproductive rights implies continuity of a massive, never-ending input of different kinds of general as well as specific education. This does, however, not mean that unsafe sex can be controlled just by means of information. Nor does it mean that it is only about sexual education for the masses; it is also about the enlightenment of, not least, political and religious authorities. What this really implies depends on course on the discursive position from which this notion is expressed. For natural reasons, this need to enlighten the power elite is experienced by representatives of paradigms that challenge the ruling cultural common sense. Unfortunately, there is no official recognition of the obvious need, and thus no intensive courses or arenas for discursive challenges, designed for political power-holders and decision-makers, who also, for rather natural reasons, because of their ascribed position, experience omniscient qualities and consequently do not need further “schooling”.

In other words, as historically experienced before, it is probably only through the resistance over time, through the centripetal, disintegrative functions of the mass media, through trial of cases before court, through civil unrest, through assiduous efforts from NGOs and popular organization, and so on (exactly what is going on right now, not only, in Nicaragua) that change will be fostered (see Berglund 1982).

Bygdeman and Lindahl (1994; see also Ohlander 1994) have composed an excellent summary of the development of sexual education, and the struggle for rights to contraception and abortion, during 100 years, in Sweden. This account to a considerable extent illustrates and proves the significance of popular mobilization in general, and the need for the commitment of concerned medical personnel,
radical women’s organizations and their agitators. According to their own view, they are describing the transition from a society where sexuality and reproduction were circumscribed by demands, shame, guilt and fear, to a society characterized by increased openness and extended possibilities for people to govern their own lives.

This process is, and has, as in Sweden, been going on for a long time. And even if the conditions for the promotion of sexual and reproductive rights are more favorable in most countries of the North compared with Nicaragua, there is really no terminal point anywhere in this struggle, which is a joint concern.

Thus, the 1970s became the harvest time for sexual enlightenment efforts invested during many decades in Sweden. Concurrently with growing political strength among radical popular and female organizations, extended reproductive health consciousness, a more open attitude to sexual matters and “better” relations between young people and adults, were achieved (op cit, p 26).

The main principle behind the massive venture of enlightenment, preceding extended sexual and reproductive rights, and the subsequent reduction of teenage pregnancies and abortions, was to let the fundamental meaning, children’s right to be wanted, diffuse through a ripple effect, generated through informants/educators within school, health care, social services, leisure and recreation departments, nonprofit organizations, and even the Church (p 25).

As in Nicaragua and the rest of the world today, mainly three demands characterized the struggle in Sweden (p 24):

- Information and educational efforts regarding sexuality and sexual relations
- Extended access to contraceptives and contraceptive counseling
- Access to legal and medically safe abortions

As a presumed result of this extensive prevention campaign, the rates of teenage pregnancies, as well as births and abortions, decreased
from 1975. This was also the year when abortions were legalized. An evaluation confirmed that this step towards medically safe abortions, and the right of the woman to decide over her own body, did not result in an increasing number of abortions, as feared. Abortions were not deliberately applied as a contraceptive measure among adolescents. Moreover, illegal abortions came to an end (p 26).

8.2.4 The Indispensability of an Open Society
A lack of openness towards sexual matters constitutes a serious risk-factor in any society trying to control early, unwanted pregnancies and the diffusion of STDs, not least HIV/AIDS. A lack of openness in this context means, for example, a lack of comprehensive public sexual education and public fora for unconditional debate and discussion on sexuality and reproduction, etc. At least, there is no evidence questioning the importance of a comprehensive supply and diffusion of sexual information and arenas for the youth to openly, without shame or fear, ventilate their thoughts, exchange information and ideas and ask questions. This is, as we have seen above, confirmed by the experiences of CARAS and Club en Conexión.

Dogmas and evasive puritanist truths do not make up an applicable platform for safe sex, as this kind of knowledge fosters defective preparedness for real life sexual challenges. As already, more or less, certified in this report, education, possibly besides material resources as a determinant of access to education, seems to constitute the most indispensable element among the bases for accumulating social power (compare Brieger 2001; Speizer 2001; Senderowitz 1998; Fawole 1999; Türmen 2003).

However, we already know, through statistics describing the consequences of unsafe sex, that access to knowledge in itself is not enough to guarantee that you make logical use of it. Nevertheless, it is globally recognized, beyond reasonable doubt, that education increases the potential of the individual to take care of her/himself. Moreover, apprehensions that talking about sex is to encourage promiscuity and a premature initiation into sexual performance, constantly come to naught.
Systematic reviews have shown school-based sex education to lead to improved awareness of risk and knowledge of risk reduction strategies, increased self-effectiveness and intention to adopt safer sex behaviors, and to delay, rather than hasten the onset of sexual activity (Welling et al, p 1718).

The contribution of Murphy and Carr (2007) convincingly emphasizes the benefits of female education, which extend well beyond the lives of the girls affected.

In other words, an early sexual debut, non-use of contraceptives, unwanted pregnancies, and so forth, must be due to other causes than too much sexual education. Yet, it is still not a matter of course among governments, policy-makers and program planners to invest what there is to invest in educational efforts. Religious, moral and cultural constructions, that is, superstructural factors, block the full insertion of this branch of weapon in the struggle for a fair distribution of sexual and reproductive rights. There are simply, as theoretically discussed above, competing discourses and conflicting political-economic values, in spite of the fact that we can – hopefully – assume that most actors, i.e. contracting parties, involved in this struggle for ideological hegemony, are interested in reproductive health promotion through the prevention of unwanted pregnancies and abortions. Probably, everybody would agree with the motto of Elise Ottesen Jensen, the initiator of the National Association for Sexual Information (RFSU) in 1933 (cited in Bygdeman and Lindahl 1994, p 15):

*I dream about the day when all children are born wanted, men and women are equal and sexuality an expression of intimacy, tenderness and pleasure.*

The problem is that this expression of human concern, in spite of its apparent reason, is ascribed different meanings depending on the discursive order within which it is interpreted, understood, and acted upon.
8.2.5 Insurrection against the Shame
As in Nicaragua today, in addition to traditional, conservative, religious discourse, it was the syndrome of moral panic, still prevailing in contemporary global society, that probably constituted the most significant obstacle to a more engaged response to the enlightenment movement in Sweden during the early 20th century. Considering the disciplinary power of the specific order of knowledge and the dominating attitudes in religious and political hegemony, concerning sexual education and information about contraceptives, of that time, as well as in contemporary Nicaragua, whose natural logic, as seen from the sexual moral of silence and shame, predicate that you set slumbering dark forces into motion and encourage, or rush, rather than endeavor to prevent sexual activity.

Attempts to prevent sexual activity by means of exhortations and warnings are, as we have seen in the interviews, still maybe the most common form of domestic sexual education. The girl learns that boys are only interested in one thing and that she would not dare show up at home pregnant. The only comfort is that she at least proved that she is in possession of necessary biological qualities to qualify as a real woman. The boy learns (although there is no rule without exceptions) at least two things: officially, that he is expected to be responsible, and, unofficially, that he gains value as a man if he is successful with women, and also if he becomes a young father.

Especially, in the case of the girl, the nagging can, to a certain extent, be considered as a variation of sexual bullying, as the mother, the grandmother or a deputy, often, “to be on the safe side”, attributes qualities of moral looseness to the girl, seeing her as a prospective bitch and an adolescent mother to be, and thus, through cultivation of low self-esteem instead of the opposite, indirectly contributes to a self-fulfilling truth.

Rani and colleagues (2003) address this issue in terms of a lack of parental straightforward communication with their children and the consequential cultivation and reproduction of sexual double standards. Inside themselves most parents disapprove of premarital sexual behavior for both the boy and the girl. But, as also revealed in
my own data (section 6.3), as they do not as a matter of course talk openly and directly about issues of sexuality, they indirectly, through, for example, different rules for their children depending on their sex, reproduce the cultural basis for sexual risk-taking behavior.

...propagating a sexual double standard that confines women or punishes them for engaging in sex outside of marriage, while encouraging men in similar behavior, is not an effective way to achieve that objective [pregnancy before marriage] (op cit, p 180).

Rani et al, also touch upon how women in Nicaragua are caught between opposing pressures from their boyfriends and from the society at large (op cit, p 179). This position becomes particularly vulnerable in silent subcultural contexts, like sexuality in conservative, neo-puritan environments where fear instead of open communication becomes the determinative force. The fear of losing her boyfriend, the fear of him learning of her knowledge about contraceptive measures which might make her a loose woman in his eyes, the fear of people and family finding out about her sexual life and so forth, reduce the probability of the woman negotiating sex and applying contraception and related sexual and reproductive health services.

So far, it is in this sphere that NGOs and clinics working with adolescent sexuality and reproductive health make an important difference, as they, in their work, take their point of departure from the reality in which young people, girls as well as boys, really live and have sex, without telling their mother. This is one expression or form of the cultures of silence that Christianson et al (2006, p 3) write about; the silent uninformed, uniformed, chaste society, at least on the surface. A little deeper inside, everybody knows or suspects, as in most families and communities of the world, what is going on.

So far in the current research process, it seems that the most crucial factors, besides of course the utterly decisive material fundaments, important for the empowerment of youth, that is, their possibilities to take command over their own sexual lifes, are about, on the one hand, the social and cultural mechanisms behind the reproduction
of sexual shame, and, on the other hand, their access to and influence upon the infrastructure of communication and learning concerning sex.

In the first case it is about the ways through which sex is passed on through generations as something both shameful and sinful. The cries from advocates for the moral panic regarding restrictions, the ban on and the control of the diffusion of different forms of visualized sensualism through the media, do not, as we have shown above, make up any efficient, functional contribution to the promotion of safe sex.

Rather, this kind of policies will block the possibilities of young people to, unconditionally, get in contact with, and relate to, their own existential conditions, socially as well as sexually, which will also limit their possibilities to orientate themselves, to understand, to choose, and to make decisions that are appropriate for them; in short, exert control.

Instead, all sexual education must take its point of departure in the needs and the questions asked by the adolescents. Notwithstanding the currents of neo-puritanism and moral panic, this is also a relatively evident trend in most of the modern Swedish information efforts in sexual matters, both in scheduled sexual education and in public service productions in the media. In Nicaragua these development tendencies are above all represented by the work of NGOs among youth, but there are also traces, as touched upon above in earlier sections, of this approach to sexual and reproductive empowerment of young people in the media. Rimby (1997, p 48) accounts for similar experiences from Cuba.

This method for information regarding sexual and reproductive matters is based on dialogue and self-reflection instead of indoctrination, and there is increased consciousness about the fact that the starting-point must be the experiences and problems of the adolescents and their possibilities to communicate their questions. My own qualitative data obtained through in-depth interviews and observation at the youth centre Centro de Atención y Recreación
para Adolescentes de Subtiaba (CARAS) in León, Nicaragua, where they have succeeded in developing a subcultural infrastructure for open communication about sexuality, even point in the direction of a considerable increase in “machismo-oppositional” consciousness and understanding of the principles of gender equality among young men.

8.2.6 The Significance of the Right to Abortion as a Reproductive Health Measure

As introduced in section 8.1.1, the issue of the woman’s right to be in charge of her own body and, accordingly, her right to give birth only to wanted children, constitutes a key conflict and obstacle in the global promotion of reproductive health.

During the seventies, which maybe could be called the golden years of sexual and reproductive health enlightenment and subsequent progress in Sweden, the abortion matter was integrated into a wider socio-political development context and approached in terms of a generally responsible and ‘positive’ attitude towards sexuality and birth control.

A key variable in this context is what characterizes its opposite alternative, the religious conservative and ‘negative’ attitude to these matters. From a behavioural scientific point of view, prohibition is seldom efficient in the guidance of behavior. A severe punishment does not seem to prevent a woman from having an abortion if she really experiences that she needs it. Capital punishment did not keep women from having abortions in Sweden right up to the 19th century (op cit, p 20), and it does not stop women from doing it today. In Cameroon, Calvès (2002) found that one of the main factors behind the decision to terminate a pregnancy, in spite of the risk for “capital punishment”, was the desire to complete a line of education.

However, as it leads to both impoverishment and an early death, the alternative, i.e. repeated childbirth, also constitutes a kind of capital punishment, realized in the form of a drawn-out execution. As in Nicaragua today, this situation was one of the driving forces behind a growing debate regarding contraceptives in the beginning of the
20th century in Sweden, a debate initiated by female pioneers and doctors confronted by these problems in their everyday lives.

From time immemorial, women have, in compliance with ruling norms, or illegally, had the responsibility for regulating the spacing of children in accordance with the rational needs of the family. In my interviews with young, poor women in Nicaragua, they were all aware of all the risks involved in becoming pregnant, irrespective of whether they were going through a delivery or not. Mostly they thought it was enough with two children, both in terms of the possibility to provide food, clothing and education for the children and in terms of defending their own health. Due to the cultural inconvenience involved in the process of negotiating safe sex, complicated by gender inequality, cultural norms regarding the use of contraceptives and, for many different reasons, poor access to contraceptives, they were in constant sexual distress and fear of becoming pregnant, and most often they had already given birth to more than two children.

As always, at all times, in any socio-cultural formation, it is primarily the poor girls who have to bear the shame and take care of the unplanned children, or risk their lives in unsafe abortions. Bygdeman and Lindahl (1994, p 12) denote the same situation as the consequence of the ban on public diffusion of information regarding contraceptives in 1911. What makes this remark especially interesting in this context is the fact that this ban was issued concurrently with the presentation of the first motion demanding sexual education in schools, which was submitted in 1910. This is an illustration of the constant co-existence of competing orders of sexual and reproductive reason at all times, which explains why there is so often a lack of rational correlation between existing knowledge and promotion policies.

The illegal abortion is consequently almost to place on a level with capital punishment, considering the risk of dying of the subsequent complications. In fact, complications after illegal abortions were, maybe still are, considered to be the most common cause of death among young women in Nicaragua, and thus more or less the very
reason why the mother project (see 1.2) behind the present study was initiated in the first place. The Nicaraguan situation regarding illegal abortions illustrates that a ban probably just strengthens the resistance, for example in the form it expresses itself in the agenda of women’s organizations growing stronger and stronger, supplemented by supportive clinics and organizations.

In other words, a ban on abortion cannot be considered to promote women’s reproductive health; rather, it constitutes a component in the social and cultural construction of both risk and unequal gender relations – directly, as it forces already vulnerable women to terminate an unwanted pregnancy unsafely, and indirectly, as it contributes to the reproduction of shame and guilt, which hampers the development of a more outspoken public attitude to sexuality and thus also the conditions for more candid communication between teenagers and adults.

8.2.7 The Impact of Political-Economic Circumstances and Structural Transformation Processes

The material well-being of a country, a reasonably fair distribution of opportunities and subsequent belief in the future among its citizens, promote more favorable conditions for both the development and the diffusion of new ideas, as well as investments in social projects such as education and social welfare. Accordingly, the promotion of social and political rights, and hence, among other things, reproductive health, can, as we have seen, not successfully be achieved without subsequent processes of socio-economic development and vice versa.

Schematically, the causal proceeding could, in a very simplistic, superficial way, without nuances, be described like this:

A prosperous society increases the possibility of employment and other opportunities supplying the individual with some of the bases for increasing their everyday life control, and, furthermore, material spill-over assimilated by public interests benefits social welfare,

- which generates belief in the future
- which generates aspirations
which generates education ambitions
which leads to a conscious desire of family planning
which leads to application of contraceptives
which requires knowledge about contraception and birth control
which requires information
which requires participation
which leads to gender equality
which leads to the reproduction of a prosperous society.

This reasoning does not exclude the possibility to nominate the struggle for gender equality and/or social justice as the point of departure of this causal chain. This is to a considerable extent what is going on, and has been going on for a long time, in Nicaragua. As in Sweden, during the 20th century, the resistance against patriarchal domination, as well as against a poverty-generating political-economic order, will lead to increased sexual and reproductive rights of women. Of course, the economic and political circumstances under which the resistance is being developed in Nicaragua are very different compared with Sweden, but still, there are similar core factors involved in both contexts.

The 1920s and the 1960s represented, especially in Western countries, periods of rapid economic change and contemporaneous, relatively radical, changes of attitudes to sex and sexual practices.

The 1960s in Sweden were in many respects prosperous, which apparently both favored the rise of alternative attitudes to sex and cohabitation, i.e. to sexual freedom, and facilitated the growth of women’s movements procuring reproductive health rights.

The 1960s are a period of structural rationalization stimulated by the general economic advance after the war. Rapid economic growth involved rising incomes to the household, and the expansion of public health and of medical and social services. Especially branches of the public sector that attracted female manpower expanded considerably. The conditions of the households changed radically through the massive entrance of women on the labor market. The public
child care system developed. Two salaries implied more money to spend and increased options in everyday life. Living conditions that previously had been the privilege of the upper and middle classes became accessible to the working classes.

To a greater extent than ever before, the materialization of women’s liberation was within reach, through increased economic independence of the woman in relation to her male partner. Concurrently, the release of the contraceptive pill, in 1964, awarded the women increased influence over their own body and sexuality. The 1960s were also the decade of sexual liberation and acceptance of alternative forms of social forms and sexual relations. Transgressing limits of established norms and challenging the system was a way to live, publicly materialized for example through sexually daring films, the expansion of the topless culture, pornography and sex clubs. International solidarity, the anti-imperialist movement and the hippie, make love not war, movement were also important components of this rebellious period, also in terms of developed neo-Marxist theoretical scholarship. Accordingly, this is also the period of second-wave radical feminism, demanding the right to employment, equal pay for equal work, free abortion and so forth.

Like the 1960s, the happy 1920s were a time of relative prosperity, in the middle of a structural rationalization period, following the second phase (steel, chemicals, electricity, petroleum) of the industrial revolution. It was a period characterized by economic liberalization, greater personal freedom, more access to pleasures in life, extended access to material goods and, until stock market crashes and the depression, hopes for a promising future, “never more war”. Masses of people left the countryside in hopes of employment in the cities. We see the emergence of new social classes, pressure and social and political institutions and the so-called mass society.

Mass society is characterized by industrialization, urbanization and the disruption of the power of tradition, implying increased division of labor, specialization, organic solidarity instead of mechanical solidarity (Durkheim), involving increased individuality, social differentiation and, hence, psychological isolation. It is in short, a
more heterogeneous and complex society, implying less informal, mechanical, authoritative, control of its members, implying relaxation of traditional, religious and conservative moral discipline and authoritarian influences.

But the concern of media research was the vulnerability of the masses to direct manipulation of capitalists and of state regulation (Boyd-Barrett 1995, p 69) by means of the mass distribution of low-taste cultural commodities through the mass media:

*Mass society has liberated the cognitive, appreciative, and moral capacities of individuals.* [...] *People make choices more freely in many spheres of life, and these choices are not necessarily made for them by tradition, authority, or scarcity* (Shils, 1961, p 82).

According to Shils (ibid), mass society in this way:

*...manifested itself in a greater stress on individual dignity and individual rights* [...] *apparent in the attitudes towards women, youth, and ethnic groups which have been in a disadvantageous position.*

These economic and socio-cultural changes decreased physical demands of work, increased leisure time, literacy, economic resources, access to mass media, *enhanced individuality, and more unabashed hedonism* (op cit, p 85) and, hence, increased consumption of culture, especially *mediocre and brutal culture* [...] as Shils (ibid) sees it. In other words, the happy 1920s brought about more open attitudes towards sexual matters but also unwanted pregnancies, abortions, and transmission of STDs, due to very poor knowledge about contraceptives. Logically, as is still the case globally, it was especially committed medical doctors and women who devoted themselves to the diffusion of sexual knowledge and the struggle for sexual and reproductive rights.

During both these periods of “sexual revolution” and the concurrent rise of sexual and reproductive rights and health consciousness, the common denominator was about cracks in prevalent discursive orders and increased openness towards sexual matters, which faci-
litated open debate and thus the generation of necessary conflict-change energy for change.

Nicaragua, as most developing countries, has not, and will not, due to its colonial economic history as supplier of natural resources and cheap labor for the benefit of the North, go through the same kind of structural transformation process. Partly, this situation provides an explanation of the precarious situation of today. Thus, for an indefinite future, the economic prosperity as a favoring force for the promotion of reproductive health does not exist in Nicaragua. Rather, there are ominous indications of further deterioration of public health conditions due to, not least, the application of neo-liberal economic policies in the form of, for example, structural adjustment programs (see for example Kawachi & Wamala 2007; Harris & Seid 2004).

Interestingly enough, the trend towards decreased precaution in sexual relations in Sweden also coincides fairly well with the time for the final breakthrough of neo-liberal political-economic ideology and policies for national and global development (see next section).

This further confirms that there is a link between economic structural changes and reproductive socio-cultural reason. Among other things, the hegemony of neo-liberal ideology has resulted in an ongoing transfer of economic power from the public to the private sector, with a deprivation of public resources available for health care for the masses as a consequence. This is what Nicaragua is facing today on top of centuries of exploitation.

Accordingly, during the last decades, there are even in Sweden, besides the deterioration of adolescent reproductive health, lesser resources allocated to education, inclusive of sexual education, and to the care of vulnerable population groups. Moreover, we see increased abuse of drugs, sexual harassment and peer sexual abuse (Edgardh 2002, p 355; Edgardh 2001) as well as other signs of increasing social uneasiness produced by contemporary hegemonic political-economic consensus.
8.2.8 No Policies are Final

The prospects of a desirable quality of sexual and reproductive health are quite likely to be found in societies that are more or less well off. No nation, culture, religion or community is perfect in terms of for example health for all, but some are better off than others. Nicaragua has been colonized, exploited and deprived of its energy in terms of natural and human resources for centuries. Sweden has been very fortunate in many respects, but has not yet achieved desirable control over sexual risk-taking behavior among adolescents. On the contrary, as clearly pointed out by Edgardh (2002) and leaving no room for doubt. In spite of investments in reproductive health control, mandatory sexual education in Swedish schools since 1955, youth clinics, well developed systems for counseling, and contraceptive services and programs for chlamydia screening for almost 20 years, the rates of teenage abortions and chlamydia and other genital infections are increasing. From 1987 to 1998 the sale of condoms decreased from 25 million condoms to 17 million (Löwhagen 2000).

This is also the point of departure for Christianson and her colleagues (2003, p 44) in their study of Swedish youth infected by *Chlamydia trachomatis*. That is, sexual risk-taking constitutes a major problem in the Swedish society, in spite of favorable policies, the necessary social, economic and technical prerequisites, widespread knowledge about sexual matters, an open and tolerant attitude towards sexual matters and the communication of love, intimacy and gender equality (see also Andersson-Ellström 1997). How can that be?

One reason is of course that sexuality is not rational, seen from a dominating, common sense, utility point a view, while sexual risk-taking partly is, psychologically, sociologically, economically, religiously, etc.

However, as revealed in the former section, there are also political-economic circumstances to consider. In spite of differences, and huge regional variation due to mainly social and economic determinants of sexual behavior (Welling et al, p 1706), both between developed and developing countries, and within these categories, there are considerable similarities regarding not only the occurrence of unsafe sex and its negative consequences, but also its causes.
The necessary ingredients for inequality and the different faces of poverty are present in both rich and poor countries, as convincingly explained by Marmot (2004) in terms of the *status syndrome*. The determinants producing vulnerability that predispose certain exposed individuals to social subordination, powerlessness and resignation, are more or less the same in both rich and poor countries. The innocent child in Sweden responds psychologically in the same way to the quality of childhood and adolescence as the Nicaraguan child. That is, if you grow up in a socio-economically destructive environment, and/or under dysfunctional family circumstances, you become psychologically predisposed to different forms of self-destructive behavior. Equally, a lack of access to the bases for accumulating social power, and unequal gender relations, produce risks independently of national or cultural context.

Even if it is beyond the aim of the present study to scrutinize this problem and get to the bottom of it, we are probably, by means of exploring the social, economic and psychological consequences of global economic “neo-liberalization”, already on the track to explaining the principal determinative roots of why we can become our own enemies in sexual practices.

We must, however, also learn more about contemporary sexual subcultures among the youth, and thus the subtle psychological mechanisms and rationalities through which unsafe sex among adolescents is being constructed, reproduced and reconstructed. There is, of course, as Edgardh (ibid) suggests a continuous change of ‘love scripts’ going on. Forsberg’s thesis (2007) also constitutes an important contribution in this context.

This constant process of transformation of sexual values, priorities and practices must be studied in relation to its structural settings. What we already do know, is that whatever we learn about the sociological and psychological mechanisms of unsafe sex, the obtained bases for interventions are continuously changing and no approach of control will last forever as the final solution to the problem. It seems, for example, as if (sexual) education, as the most important public health promoting variable, levels off concurrently with the
existence, level and quality of the current education and welfare system, while other more subtle and informal mechanisms become more interesting in the explanation of why we expose ourselves to unsafe sex.

Today, in Nicaragua, as well as in Sweden, in the same way as in the 1920s, there is a problem when there is a lack of balance between increased symbolic freedom, possibilities, expectations, hopes and existing/available knowledge, and subsequent consciousness within the individual about risks, responsibilities, obligations, contraceptives, etc.

8.2.9 There is No Escape from the Need to Address Structural Determinants

Economic progress is, as we have seen, not enough. Without corresponding changes of those structural conditions that determine how the global public good is distributed, the potential of developed consciousness cannot be fully taken advantage of, and not even then, due to the ongoing struggle between different orders of knowledge in our minds. Our membership in different, both competing and peacefully co-existing discursive orders, produces an incoherently structured kind of common sense, on the basis of which we have to orient ourselves in real life. Luckily enough, this does not only open up for us to become our own enemies in certain situations, but also offers new discoveries and opportunities.

Nevertheless, the promotion of sexual and reproductive rights and health cannot be accomplished in isolation from the general struggle for access to the bases for accumulating social power, and thus also rights to education, health and dental care, employment, labor unions, etc, inclusive of gender equality, contraception, safe abortions and so forth.

This was also the basis of the National Association for Sexual Information (RFSU; http://www.rsfu.se) when it was formed in 1933. It was not only about birth control, but part of a social policy for education and equality. In this way Puntos de Encuentro, in Nicaragua (http://www.puntos.org.ni) to a considerable extent combines the
ideology, objectives, strategies and methods of both RFSU and the National Association for Sexual Equality of Rights (RFSL; http://www.rfsl.se), except for the clinical component run by RFSU.

Knowledge about contraceptives was one part – employment, salary and education the other part – which influences women’s possibilities to control their sexuality and reproduction (op cit, p 14).

As touched upon in section 8.1, the notion of the determinative impact of structural conditions, generally, is not by any means particularly controversial. Just as it is not about a lack of political willingness, as I discussed in 8.1.2, it is not about a lack of scientific evidence and social consciousness regarding the need to fight poverty.

Thus, in this matter, Wellings and his colleagues (2006) constitute good representatives of prevalent scientific consensus concerning the need to address the broader determinants of sexual behavior, particularly those that relate to the social context (p 1706). They also address the problem involved, as it demands a broader definition of public health than many might feel comfortable working within (p 1720). This is indeed an understatement, especially if we, for example, read “broader definition” as “political definition”. Accordingly, when they certify that structural factors such as poverty, unemployment and gender are difficult to modify… (ibid), they also, once again, confirm what we have discussed several times above, that the common sense of the hegemonic neo-liberal economic order of knowledge, per definition, does not contain or carry the necessary conceptual tools to essentially attack “the broader determinants”, as they constitute the antithesis of the fundamental order of knowledge of the discourse.

Thus, when Welling et al apologetically state that: Yet, efforts are being made to address forces as gender and poverty in innovative ways… (ibid), the last three words, “in innovative ways”, symptomatically illustrate and confirm the ideologically reproducing dilemma of research and education. What does innovative mean in this context? First of all, two things: on the one hand, there are of course forces in motion, as we see them expressing themselves, for example, both symbolically in UN documents and in innovative pro-
jects realized by committed organizations and individuals representing oppositional discourses. But, on the other hand, “innovative”, from an antagonistic discursive position, can also be understood as a clever way to address the obvious problem without touching its basic causes and challenging the power structures within which they are embedded, and thus, indirectly, ideologically certifying the democratic legitimacy of the prevalent order.

In innumerable textbooks, articles, etc, “everybody” agrees about the problem of poverty and the need to address it as a structural determinant causing all kinds of health problems, while the structural determinants behind poverty and gender inequality, etc., largely remain absent, although always silently present, in applied policies as well as in education and research.

As proven so many times through history, real political participation and influence for the promotion of basic human rights unfortunately imply a lot of pain and victims along the trail (see Berglund 1982 for a theoretical discussion). In contemporary Nicaragua, current legislation concerning abortions will, unfortunately, result in many years in prison for many women before the basic rights of gender equality and sexual and reproductive health are won.

8.2.10 The Power of the Sense of Prospect
In other words, measures to improve the conditions for promoting safe sex and adolescents’ power over their sexual and reproductive health cannot really be achieved without a subsequent change of structural conditions and power relations, especially those obstructing a more equal distribution of the bases for accumulating social power and structural transformation processes which improve living conditions and stimulate beliefs in the future among the masses.

The most important protecting factors against unwanted pregnancies, besides material resources, consist of:

- Aspirations (constructed by social and psychological predispositions);
- A sense of there being a future (determined by the bases for accumulating social power);
• Consciousness about the existence of different knowledges, concerning the biology, medicine, chemistry, physiology, technology, psychology, sociology, etc., of sexuality and reproduction.

Both impoverishment (through hopelessness, indifference and apathy) and cultural agreements/reason that deprive women of power over their body of and reproductive life (through, for example, patriarchal gender relations and bans on abortions instead of contraceptive counseling) imply everyday sexual risk-taking. Future prospects, hopes and expectations, in combination with education and real options and possibilities, protect, as these constituents influence the attitude to sexuality, sexual practice and reproduction. The data collected by Kaufman and her colleagues (2004) further support this notion, showing positive correlations between community conditions, in terms of, for example, average wages and educational levels, and safer sex practices.

...teens’ willingness to invest in themselves, should reflect expected return on that investment (Fischhoff et al 2000, p 189)

In contemporary Nicaragua, both impoverishment and aspirations, as ideal type representations of core elements involved in the construction of different routes of reproductive health behavior, are present. Impoverishment implies a lack of access to the bases for accumulating social power and, accordingly, constitutes, under any circumstances, the ground for any form of sexual and reproductive risk. Beyond a certain limit of resignation you do not really care, but rather, desperately celebrate your suffering, to repeat Tourigny’s (1998, p 149) illustrative expression. Paradoxically enough, in this vulnerable situation, you in fact, through the passivity inflicted upon you, morally comply with the decrees of the Church, by skipping the contraceptives and leaving to God to decide how many children you will have, even if it is for the wrong reasons, i.e. not primarily because of your religious beliefs. Nevertheless, you are culturally rewarded, because in a certain way you are doing the right thing, even if you, from another point of view, are doing yourself a disservice. Maybe, as a woman, you are even risking your own life, and, if you already are a mother, maybe risking to make your child/children motherless.
Aspirations and hopes for the future, presuppose, at least to some extent, time, resources, and at least a sense that there are opportunities, and they imply, as we have seen, both a potential risk and a potential basis for a safe sex life.

Once again, sexual education and the possession of the above-mentioned kinds of understanding, are thus essential beyond negotiation, but they are not independent of (rather both effect and contributing cause of) social changes towards an increased general level of education, social justice and equality. Sexual risk-taking cannot be informed away.

As I have reasoned earlier in this text, submission to traditional religious authority in your sex life, that is, abstaining from sex before marriage, does protect from early unwanted pregnancy. However, outside this ideal type, normative context, the religious frame of reference does not offer sufficient cognitive preparedness for managing the contradictory socio-cultural demands of contemporary, globally integrated, Nicaragua. Rather, it contributes to the consolidation of the problem, in the sense that it reproduces gender inequality and, accordingly, the lack of power of the woman over her own reproductive life and, hence, her reproductive health.

8.3 A PLATFORM FOR INTERVENTIONS

8.3.1 Beyond Individual Behavioral Change
As thoroughly argued above, sexual and reproductive health is a matter of the degree of access to the bases for accumulating social power. That is, the privilege to be in relative control of your life, is about the degree of access to, among other things, productive assets, financial resources, health, education, social networks, personal safety, political organizing, economic organizing, trade-union organizing, civic information and social services. These bases are generally, as a matter of course, more commonly within relative reach of the common man in the so-called developed part of the world (see www.gapminder.org).

Accordingly, health as a human right is above all to be accomplished by achieving internationally recognized needs for the diffusion
of gender equality and democracy and the formulated millennium goals for the elimination of poverty. This in turn will, however, not be achieved without the empowerment of broader sectors of the population in poor countries. This notion is theoretically and politically agreed upon among international development institutions and organizations. But, as discussed above, it nevertheless remains, for partly obvious reasons, a utopian vision in practice.

Thus, as among others, Tones and Green’s (2006, p 73) health promotion strategies, including reproductive health, are too often reduced to an emphasis on downstream behavioural risk factors rather than a more upstream focus on the structural factors that affect people’s lives.

In the same sense, Welling et al (op cit, p 1716) argue that:

...approaches focusing exclusively on expectations on individual behaviour change are unlikely to produce substantial improvements in sexual health status. They are especially inappropriate to poor country circumstances, where sex is more likely to be tied to livelihoods, duty and survival, and where individual agency is restricted.

In the same spirit of understanding, Cowan (2002, p 316) concludes that, on the one hand, change of individual behaviour will ...best be sustained within a community that is broadly supportive... and, on the other hand, the broader cultural perspective of the community will greatly influence the feasibility of delivering an intervention within that community and will also affect how the recipients respond to it.

The only thing objectionable in this last formulation concerns the faintly suggested top-down perspective, as if change must be initiated and brought from the enlightened elite above, down to the dense masses. Rather, both structural and behavioural change has its starting point in the knowledge about real living conditions, and the desire for change, among ordinary people, sometimes revealed and developed in collaboration with researchers, sometimes expressed through social and/or political organizing.
Notwithstanding this last remark, Cowan (p 317) is of course right about the fact that adolescent reproductive health interventions traditionally, unfortunately, do not address structural factors, like physical, social, cultural, organisational, community, economic, legal or policy aspects of environment..., which impedes their success. In other words, interventions must combine behavioural and structural approaches and must probably sometimes also involve institution building efforts.

Consequently, as recurrently stressed above, a platform for the promotion of sexual and reproductive health in most environments must take its point of departure in the general empowerment of the target populations concerned.

...the evidence shows that they [interventions] need to go beyond mere provision of information to be effective (op cit, p 1717).

The NGOs and other bodies with youth and women empowerment agendas, working with reproductive rights and health, thus constitute indispensable forces in this process in Nicaragua and should be supported more seriously by international development communities. In this study, the work realized by CARAS and Club en Conexión functions as examples of how sexual and reproductive empowerment can be fostered.

8.3.2 Fora for Young Agents in Interaction
Besides the ideal to grow up in an ideal-type sound, complete family in an ideal-type society built on realized human rights, the promotion of sexual and reproductive health among young people requires fora, arenas, spaces, etc, where they can meet to get to know each other within and across gender boundaries.

Youth interventions like CARAS and Club en Conexión are based on, and afford, this possibility. These fora constitute an important counterbalance to the often misdirected concern supplied by peer groups and family. Both in my interviews and in other sources, such as Rani and colleagues (2004, p 179), we experience how for, example, parents “protect” their children, especially their girls from
sexual issues, including knowledge about contraception and how to search for knowledge in itself. More or less as a rule, parents restrict their daughters’ social mobility as well their access to both formal and informal sexual education.

Even if living with both parents, irrespective of the national and cultural context, reduces the risk for both an early initiation into sexual activities in general and sexual risk-taking behaviours in particular (Mehryar 2003, p 22), it is seldom through communication with your parents that you get initiated into the secrets of sexuality. From your parents you do not often get the tempting, juicy details that eventually will make you expose yourself to your first sexual experiences, nor the latest conquests within modern contraception. Rather, the family constitutes an important socialization unit where prevalent social norms are being reproduced and consolidated. More or less “instinctively”, this process can also be recognized in most, so-called, liberal, progressive, well-educated and open-minded families.

Still, consciousness-raising activities involving and found to be supportive of condom use among adolescents by Meekers & Klein (2002, p 343) are lacking in the work of most concerned NGOs. However, this shortcoming, which also has got its self-explanatory point, is duly compensated through the presence of other adults. The most serious problem is rather that the vulnerable target group, poor young women in rural areas, mostly is not reached by this kind of interventions.

Thus, as revealed in the data from Nicaragua, confirmed by data from other parts of the world, adolescents are torn between socio-cultural norms and the behaviour of peers, the strongest predictors of sexual behaviour (ibid), and of course mediated stimuli through global media. Politically and religiously independent NGOs, working with sexual and reproductive rights among youth and women, in this situation become oases, where, in dialogue and debate, it becomes possible for adolescents to orient themselves and build self-confidence in sexual matters. To a considerable extent, nominated independent organizations effectuate so-called “life skills education programs” as a contribution to sexual and reproductive empowerment. These activities, as, for example, illustrated in the examples of CARAS and
CEC, contribute to …negotiation skills and assertiveness, as means of promoting self-efficacy within sexual relationships (ibid).

It is also confirmed by Rani and Lule (2004):

Youth development programs that, in addition to providing reproductive health information and services, address a wide range of need (e.g., life skills, literacy, vocational training and livelihood activities) have been more successful in reaching poor youth than other types of programs (p 115).

Meekers and Klein (2002, p 344) agree, based on data from Cameroon. Increased awareness of sexual risks, training in interpersonal communications to increase self-efficacy and relief from “condom shyness” were found to be important components in any intervention strategy and this is what CARAS and CEC, among others, are working with.

This need for fora for the problematizing, scrutinizing and discussion of the normally unquestioned everyday discourses regarding sexual issues, is further confirmed by Kofi Glover and colleagues (2003, p 38), on the basis of their data from Ghana. They experience that prevalent attitudes and norms …appear to be more important barriers to improved reproductive health than lack of education. Specifically, existing norms seem to inhibit conversations about reproductive health among friends and within relationships. That is, within interventional initiatives such as CARAS, CEC, Puntos de Encuentro, etc, these conversations are initiated, encouraged and maintained.

Moreover, the NGO concerned makes a platform for the development of alternative peer networks based on shared experiences and extended sexual knowledge developed through the activities within the organization, which, in line with the reasoning of Aalsma et al (2004, p 177) …may influence adolescent sexual behaviours by a process of social control. Their notion of the importance of social network theory in understanding adolescent health-related behaviour is indeed worth paying attention to in this context.
Thus, these organizations to a considerable extent seem to provide the first-aid kit of what most research experiences conclude to be subsequent reproductive health problems resulting from, above all, poverty, the causes of which are apprehended in different ways depending on the applied paradigm, and, therefore, in the name of impartiality mostly remain unaddressed.

Among other things, as we know, poverty leads to poor access to social services, public information, education, etc, and, furthermore, to the disintegration of families, due to unemployment, migration and domestic violence, which, among young women, leads to unfulfilled emotional needs and poor self-esteem, which in turn increases the risk for a lack of bargaining power, fear of violence and of becoming abandoned, and, hence, resignation to unsafe sex.

As revealed throughout this research process, this situation, in combination with prevailing gender norms and cultural expectations, such as sexual ignorance as a feature of femininity (Türmen 2003, p 414) and the celebration of sexual conquest and promiscuity as an ideal of masculinity (op cit, p 412), is what makes especially the young woman end up in a particularly vulnerable life situation, including, among other things, the status and bargaining power necessary to refuse sex, and thus exposure to infections (ibid; Bayley 2003, p 831) and submission to unsafe sex as a survival strategy due to a lack of education and skills (Türmen 2003, p 415).

Courtney (2000) supplements and widens this notion by showing how the patriarchal society, which rewards adherence to dominating cultural definitions of masculine definitions and behaviours, is also dangerous to men as the signifiers of “true” masculinity – are largely unhealthy (p 1397). In the same way, Hill et al (2004, p 24) report that the possibility for men in the poor north of Brazil to engage in unprotected extramarital sex was almost 4 times higher compared with other more prosperous regions, where machismo values and behaviour were also less prevalent and salient.

The contribution of youth and women’s organizations in this context consists to a large extent in the provision of relevant information, skills and services necessary to make informed decisions, peer-led,
in place of, or supplementary to, formal sexual education, life-skills education and the development of assertiveness, communication and decision-making skills (Bayley 2003, p 831).

Interestingly enough, the list of gender issues that Türmen (op cit, p 417, derived from UNAIDS) wants to be incorporated in the curricula and training for future obstetricians and gynaecologists, corresponds perfectly with the agenda of the above named NGOs in Nicaragua:

- Encourage discussions of the ways in which boys and girls are brought up and expected to behave;
- Challenge concepts of masculinity and femininity, based on inequality and aggressive and passive stereotypes;
- Encourage men and boys to talk about sex, violence, drug use and AIDS with each other and their partners;
- Teach female assertiveness and negotiation skills in relationships, sex and reproduction;
- Teach and encourage male sexual and reproductive responsibility;
- Teach and promote respect for, and responsibility towards, women and children;
- Teach and promote equality in relationships and in the domestic and public spheres;
- Support actions to reduce male violence, including domestic and sexual violence;
- Encourage men to be providers of care and support in the family and community; and
- Encourage understanding and acceptance of men who have sex with men.

8.3.3 Easy Shame-Relieved Access to Knowledge, Networking, Health and Counseling Services

Accordingly, it seems as if the most essential first-aid contribution of CARAS and “El Club”, and corresponding youth and women’s interventions and organizations, consists in their role as supplementary suppliers of several bases for accumulating social, and thus, sexual and reproductive power.
The importance and value of the kind of youth interventions performed by the organizations presented in this report are, as a matter of fact, confirmed in all the studies I have read, touching upon the issue. The following statement by Bearinger et al (2007) is representative of these observations:

*All adolescents need access to quality youth-friendly services [...] Sex education programs should offer accurate comprehensive information while building skills for negotiating sexual behaviors. Girls and boys also need equal access to youth development programs that connect them with supportive adults and with educational and economic opportunities* (p 1220).

Unlike CARAS, Club Conexión does not offer reproductive health services, but both organizations constitute important centres of enlightenment, or maybe more correctly, islands of resistance, as carriers of a selection of oppositional orders of knowledge, in relation to prevalent socio-cultural values and religious norm system.

An extremely important, and in fact indispensable, component in this context concerns the direct involvement of the youth themselves in the promotion of sexual and reproductive health, both as sources of experience and as educators of other young people. The adolescents themselves know the determining conditions of their sexual and reproductive lives far better than any researcher or policymaker, and they know far better also what their needs are. This notion is illustratively exemplified by Plan (http://www.plan-international.org), in a comment published in the Lancet (April 15th, 2006), when they ask the simple but essential question: *why don’t we ask the adolescents?* Or as González Olmeda (2005, p 191) expresses it:

*Unfortunately, it is very common to identify them as just beneficiaries of these programmes, without their participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of them.*

Well, they are easily found and they are eager to contribute to change. Participatory Action Research constitutes one tool.
The duty of society is to supply the necessary resources. All sexual and reproductive health empowerment processes imply the indispensable need for:

- Open, shame-relieved and unaffected access to all conceivable kinds of information and knowledge=comprehension through all kinds of mediating forms, such as lectures, film shows, theatre, dance, debates, magazines, radio, TV, courses and so forth. The participation and productions of the youth-groups themselves are of course essential.
- Open, shame-relieved and unaffected access to, medical as well as social and psychological, sexual and reproductive health counselling and service, corresponding to a combination of the functions performed by the Swedish BRIS, RFSL, RSFU, BUP and youth clinics.
- Open, shame-relieved and unaffected access to spaces where future adults can meet, and develop networks, under positive, tolerant circumstances and, unconditionally and without prejudice, get to know themselves, their own sexuality, etc., in relation to other adolescents, and receive answers to their questions regarding sex without having to hide their natural curiosity.

As I have touched upon before, this consciousness about the self-explanatory needs of adolescents is nothing new. Strangely enough, however, this understanding does not seem to be obvious and does not appear as something natural and self-evident in health promotion policies.

*Reproductive health programs for young people are relatively new. Involving youth in active roles in these programs is even newer, and it is proving challenging to traditional program managers. [...] From available information, it is clear that youth involvement results in many advantages to a program, its target audience and the participating youth themselves* (Senderowitz, 1998, p 5).

Sexual and reproductive health promotion among youth cannot be accomplished through information campaigns and strategies of “blaming the victim” but is a question of supplying the necessary
means by which adolescents can achieve command over their own sexual and reproductive life. This is also the experience of Centre for Development and Population activities (CEDPA, 2003) in Senegal:

...research has shown that programs focusing solely on medical and biological information had less of an impact on behaviour. However, using curricula that integrate knowledge, attitude, life skills, communication, negotiation and capacity building ... have had more success in developing safe behaviour and changing habits among youth, ...

Nevertheless, not only in Nicaragua and other poor countries, but also in the so-called developed world, represented by, for example, Sweden, sufficient resources are not invested in the well-being of the young, which expresses itself in the increasing rates of STDs and mental health problems among adolescents. Schools, preschools and day-care centres have all been the objects of public saving strategies. The responsibility shouldered in Nicaragua by the above-mentioned types of organizations should of course be a public concern, as an investment in basic human rights and a healthier society. As argued by Bayley (2003, p 831): Neither life-skills education nor quality improvement of health services are expensive interventions. [...] but

...a positive cost-benefit trade-off.

Another important remark in this context is the need to make permanent the strategy of involving youth in youth health promotion programmes. It is not enough with occasional interventions. This notion applies to most reproductive health efforts. An evaluation of the effectiveness of social marketing to promote adolescent reproductive health in Guinea proved that peer involvement in education, mass media support and social marketing can improve reproductive health knowledge, but that changing behaviour requires a longer intervention (Rossem & Meekers 1999). CARAS, CEC, Puntos de Encuentro (http://www.puntos.org.ni), Maria Barreda, to mention a few, represent what you could call longer interventions, and they have proved to make a lot of difference to the adolescents involved and reached by their work. For obvious reasons, supporting already functioning interventions of this kind would be an extremely, as cited
above, positive cost-benefit trade-off, in any context of reproductive health promotion.

8.3.4 Further Research
How much more knowledge do we really need, about what and why, to be able to promote sexual and reproductive rights and health in a more successful way? It seems we know more or less enough about the face, logic, rationality, background and causes of global sexual risk-taking behaviour and its consequences. We know considerably less about why we cannot make use of what we already know. We also know too little about who “we” really are, and why these kinds of issues are not taken more seriously in the scientific community.

Besides these overall problematic issues, with this report as the point of departure, there are especially three supplementary studies worth conducting.

• To complete more in detail the contribution of different types of NGO interventions to the promotion of sexual and reproductive rights and health. The first step would be to compare the strategies and experiences of CARAS and CEC. Their work is based on slightly different “ideologies”, and they approach, recruit, organize and stimulate youth in slightly different ways and might therefore have different, mutually supplementing, experiences to convey to the global reproductive health community. There are already quite a lot of data collected through the present study, but it is necessary to realize a separate study on this issue.

• To conduct a separate mass media study focusing on the issues addressed initially in the present study in section 1.4.1.

• To conduct a separate study of how these issues are approached publicly, as addressed initially in the present study in section 1.4.1.

• To carry through a true PAR-intervention study, within the current problem area, in accordance with all recognized rules, preferably in a rural/semi-rural setting. Necessary networks and infrastructural resources for the accomplishment of such a study are already available.


CODENI - Federación Coordinadora Nicaraguense de ONG’s que trabajan com la Ninez y la adolescencia, *Explotación sexual Comercial contra Niñas y Adolescentes*.


10 APPENDIX

10.1 COMMENT BY EQUIPO MARY BARREDA

1

Equipo Mary Barreda: La carencia de afecto es uno de los factores que hace a que las adolescentes salgan embarazadas, porque sientes que van a tener a alguien que es de ellas, un hijo que las va a querer a dar carino. Por otro lado reafirmarse como mujer y como madre.

10.2 COMMENTS BY EQUIPO CLELIA GALEANO

1

Equipo Clelia Galeano: Cuando se les pregunta a un grupo de adolescentes acerca de quien fue la persona que les hablo de sexo y de métodos para protegerse coinciden una gran mayoría que fue por algún amigo y en menor proporción fue por algún familiar (hermano, tío, padres).

El sexo es un tema tabú en muchas familias en la actualidad y es por esto que el joven se da cuenta de muchas cosas por gente ajenas a su familia.

Nos dijo un joven:”estábamos un grupo de jóvenes hablando de música y de un montón de babosadas, cuando uno de ellos preguntó: ¿ya lo hiciste? y me quedo viendo a mí!, si decía que no, hubieran creído que no soy hombre, entonces dije que sí, pero sin dar detalles, entonces ellos empezaron a hablar sobre su primera
experiencia sexual y comentaron, que era mejor hacerlo sin preservativo ya que la sensación era más placentera”.

Cuando el chavalo terminó de hablar, nos comentó que le gustó que en un grupo de jóvenes se hablara con libertad del tema pero critico una actitud, el hecho de que el muchacho no se protegiera; como sintió la inquietud lo consultó con su hermano mayor, el cual le dijo que siempre debía protegerse.

Analizando el caso en el grupo, llegamos a la conclusión de que si este joven hubiese tomado como verdadero lo que su amigo le dijo, hubiese tenido una desagradable experiencia al resultar contagiado por alguna enfermedad venérea, por tanto estuvo bien que lo consultara con alguien de más confianza y con mayores conocimientos que el.

No todos los jóvenes consultan con sus padres, hermanos u otros familiares sobre sexualidad, por ello es que hay muchos jóvenes que actúan irresponsablemente. Muchos otros tenemos la dicha de tener padres que con toda “libertad y confianza” nos hablan acerca de nuestra sexualidad, esto es lo más indicado y sería mucho mejor si se reforzara esta información en las escuelas ya sea públicas o privadas.

2  
**Equipo Clelia Galeano:** Los chavales y chavales nicas están muy influenciados por la religión. Aunque en el país no hay una religión oficial, hay grupos predominantes, tal como el Catolicismo, que son una gran mayoría; los que pertenecen a este grupo son jóvenes con mas libertades, se les permite bailar, tener novios o novias y se les habla con más libertad acerca de su sexualidad. Los evangélicos son un grupo más limitado, se les inculca a los jóvenes que es prohibido bailar, ya que se ofende a Dios. A las mujeres no se les permite pintarse, tener novios. Los testigos de Jehová son muy parecidos; en ambos grupos no se les permite a los jóvenes hablar libremente de su sexualidad, menos hacerse sujetos y no objetos de la misma.
No se les habla de métodos anticonceptivos en ninguna de las religiones, aunque el catolicismo es la más abierta; pero según ellos las parejas deben tener relaciones solo si están casados y deben tener los hijos que Dios les de, en lo que no estamos de acuerdo, porque realmente nosotros somos los dueños de nuestro cuerpo y somos los únicos para decidir en que momento tener relaciones, con quién y como hacerlo; esto implica también el hecho de ser responsables, cuidarnos por alguna enfermedad y planificar cuántos hijos vamos a tener y cuando.

3

**Equipo Clelia Galeano:** En nuestro país aparentemente todos tenemos acceso a la educación por igual, que no se cumple a cabalidad; ya que son miles de jóvenes que se quedan sin derecho a ingresar a una universidad cada año. Hay mucha diferencia en cuanto al conocimiento y en tanto al empoderamiento sexual de los jóvenes dependiendo de su educación; hay muchachos y muchachas que estudian en colegios públicos y que no tienen la dicha de que se les eduque en su sexualidad y otros que estudian en colegios privados tienen esa ventaja; aunque no en todos los colegios. Además depende de muchas de las cosas que el ministerio de educación permita que se les impartan, ya que según ellos y muchos adultos no se les debe hablar a los jóvenes de sexo ni de métodos anticonceptivos, porque se les empuja a tener sexo (la verdad es que nos creen tontos, no nos creen capaces de decidir de que nosotros podemos responsabilizarnos por nuestra sexualidad). Si supieran que de una u otra manera los y las jóvenes nos damos cuenta ya sea por ellos o por otras fuentes de estos temas que para algunos adultos sigue siendo un TABÚ. Todos los jóvenes vivimos individualmente experiencias en cuanto a nuestra sexualidad dependiendo en gran parte de la educación nuestra y por tanto de nuestros padres. Entre nosotros hay padres que aún siendo profesionales no tuvieron la confianza de hablarles a sus hijos acerca de sexo y métodos de protección, a lo mejor porque sus padres no lo hicieron con ellos. En cambio hay padres que no son profesionales pero sí hablaron con sus hijos al respecto. Por tanto llegamos a la conclusión de que realmente no depende de la educación de los padres sino de la comunicación y confianza que hay entre padres e hijos.
Claro que la educación de los padres tienen que ver en el problema de hablar de sexo porque aunque los padres que tuvieron educación hablan con los hijos eso significa que probablemente ellos estén dando mala información de sexualidad a sus hijos ya que ellos no recibieron educación sexual.

10.3 COMMENTS BY FRANCIS MARTINEZ

1
Francis Martinez: ...los padres se le evitan la responsabilidad, diciendo a la chica que esto no es de su chico ... eso fue problema de ella, porque ella se lo busco...

2
Francis Martinez: Para tomar decisiones l@s jóvenes tienen que tomar en cuenta las cosas que los padres dicen, las cosas que dicen en la escuela, las cosas de la religión, las cosas que dicen los amigos y las cosas que dicen los medios de información, por tanto se hace difícil tomar una decisión respecto al sexo. Aunque uno concientemente sabe que está mal no protegerse, tiene relaciones sexuales porque no sabe a quién hacer caso, a quién obedecer.

3
Francis Martinez: Mis padres siempre me decían que tenía que ser una profesional para luego formar una familia... La prioridad para mis padres siempre fue que estudiara, fuera profesional y trabajara para ser independiente económicamente.

4
Francis Martinez: Solo se puede cambiar si se elimina la forma de pensar de los adultos porque así los jóvenes no se van a corromper de mala información respecto a sexualidad. Se necesita una nueva generación de padres. Cambiar el pensamiento de los viejos es difícil, lo único que se puede hacer es cambiar la forma de pensar de los jóvenes. Es muy difícil combinar el conocimiento de la sexualidad con la cultura religiosa.
Francis Martinez: Sabemos que tenemos que ocultar de nuestros padres el hecho de que ya tenemos relaciones sexuales porque si lo descubren nos matan, mejor no de hablar. Todo depende de que lo que uno piensa al respecto de los jóvenes no es correcto porque yo antes pensaba que la joven que salía embarazada era porque ella lo quería más sin embargo no es así porque las jóvenes salen embarazadas porque en realidad desconocen el tema de sexualidad. En clases no se aborda a profundidad el tema de sexualidad, y los padres piensan que sí y que no tienen responsabilidad de enseñar a sus hijos sobre sexo.

Francis Martinez, herself, spends 4-5 hours in front of the TV. As most female informants she prefers novelas Brasilenas before the Mexican as the latter always “are the same”:

La chica pobre que se enamora del chico rico y por lo cual ella vive siendo humillada por los padres del chico y de toda la gente de la misma clase social del chico, pero que al final después de tanto sufrimiento tienen un final feliz y se quedan juntos y viven felices por siempre...y la Brasilena...es que son de distintas tramas ya que no se enfocan en una sola pareja si no que tratan de dar a conocer como es la realidad brasileña como vive la familia y la sociedad brasileña, además de que aprovechan las novelas para dar a conocer su cultura y sus paisajes maravillosos... no se enfocan en que uno tiene que ser feliz siempre si no que enfrentan temas que son reales...
Una de las novelas brasileñas que gustó mucho fue EL CLON porque nos dio a conocer la cultura arabe...ellos tenían varias esposas, hablaban otro idioma, etc...

Francis Martinez: Normalmente el tema que abordan las mamás es que las chicas tienen que cuidarse de no tener relaciones sexuales para no salir embarazada
Francis Martinez: La mayoría de las revistas son de espectáculo. Por falta de electricidad, el medio de mayor acceso es la radio.

Francis Martinez: Normalmente en los lugares de muy escasos recursos económicos o que son del área rural los padres enseñan a las hijas que lo principal es saber; planchar, lavar, cocinar, limpiar, cuidar el hogar, cuidar a los hijos, atender al marido, en general las chicas son educadas para ser madres y amas de casa.

Francis Martinez: La relación con la mamá puede ser buena en todos los sentidos. Sin embargo, si la comunicación a nivel de sexualidad no es buena entonces, la comunicación no tiene importancia por tanto aunque una hija tenga comunicación con la mamá mientras no la tenga en el sentido sexual, es posible que la hija cometa errores. Entonces lo importante para el adolescente es obtener la información correcta acerca de la sexualidad para que no cometa errores que pongan en peligro su futuro, pero siempre es mejor la comunicación con la madre, por que si no es así ello permite que los jóvenes tengan una doble moral.

Francis Martinez: Cuando una como novia ya tiene relaciones con su novio el se cree con derechos sobre una, entonces en ese sentido la relación cambia el hombre ya siente que es dueño de una y nos empiezan a prohibir cosas como por ejemplo salir con amigos varones incluso con las amigas mujeres o no les gusta que usemos ropa pequeña.

Francis Martinez: Los padres obligan a los hijos a casarse cuando la chica está embarazada... y eso no es bueno porque probablemente la relación de pareja no va a funcionar lo que puede provocar traumas en el niño que ambos tienen, después de un tiempo de estar juntos normalmente las parejas se separan.
Francis Martinez: Como jovenes sabemos que es dificil lograr que los jovenes no tengan relaciones sin embargo lo mejor que pueden hacer el gobierno y los medios de comunicacion en ensenar metodos de prevencion de embarazo y de proteccion de enfermedades de transmision sexual... el club tratamos de ensenar a los jovenes que deben iniciar tarde las relaciones sexuales porque mientras mas rapido las inicien hay mas riesgo pero tambien como somos jovenes y sabemos que como joven es dificil abstenerce les ensenarmos metodos de prevencion de embarazo y de infecciones de transmision sexual.

Francis Martinez: Si los programas de los organismos no nos crean una conciencia de que debemos cuidarnos por tales y tales motivos no va a servir de nada toda la informacion que ellos nos puedan brindar... para mi no existe la conciencia sin accion.

Francis Martinez: Hay un programa en el canal 2 que se llama "Margarita te voy a contar" en este programa algunas veces presentan temas que son educativos en distintos sentidos a veces tratan temas de: embarazo en adolescentes, como vive las personas pobres, cuentan historia de personas que se superan o historias de jovenes que estan en las drogas o en pandillas, en una ocasion se trataba de que ellos le iban a ensenar a dos chicas como vive la gente que vive en extrema pobreza, ya que estas chicas le exigian mucho a los padres y por su condicion economica ellos no podian darles todo lo que ellas querian, entonces las llevaron a vivir con esta familia pobre por 1 semana y asi ellas conocieron como vive la gente muy pobre; los ninos no comen, tienen que ir trabajar al basusero, no estudian y luego de esa semana ellas pidieron perdon a sus padres y les agradecieron lo poco que ellos les podian dar, entonces al conocer y vivir la realidad de otros ellas cambiaron su forma de pensar y reflexionaron al que sus problemas no eran tan graves como los de otros ninos, fue un programa muy educativo y emotivo ya que en lo personal a uno lo pone triste observa lo mal que viven algunas familias, las necesidades y el hambre que pasan muchos ninos.
Francis Martinez: Es importante lo que el dice. Ya que muchas veces los varones presionan a su pareja de seguir teniendo relaciones sexuales y si ellas no lo hacen las amenazan con que van a desprestigiarlas.

Francis Martinez: Porque en un hogar donde la mama nunca ha trabajado u obtenido ingresos propios sino que ha sido mantenida por su marido toda la vida entonces educan a la hija para estar sometida a las exigencias de su marido por ello la hija no tiene nadie quien la motive a ser una mujer independiente y por eso todo es repetitivo, la mama y el papa le dicen que tiene que saber lavar, planchar, cocinar, atender a su marido y por eso la hija no tiene pensamiento de ser una mujer independiente. Eso tiene mucho que ver con la educacion, ya que normalmente en la familia priorizan los estudios del hijo varon. Entonces, si los padres no tienen mucho dinero para dar educacion a todos los hijos, priorizan a los varones, y las mujeres no tienen oportunidad de estudiar.

Francis Martinez: Para la mayoría de los hombres tener poder sexual significa tener varias mujeres, tener bastante sexo y no usar condón. Esto es porque la minoría de hombres ha recibido una buena educación sexual, estos que han obtenido información saben que tienen que cuidarse y protegerse de ITS, también saben que no se es mas hombre teniendo bastante sexo y que es mejor cuidarse aunque muy dentro de ellos conservan cierto machismo esto es porque pienso que el machismo es algo que va a ser dificil eliminarlo pero con buena educacion y el tiempo disminuya el machismo en la sociedad nicaragüense.

Francis Martinez: La religión es una gran piedra en el camino para que nosotras tengamos poder sexual ya que desde pequeñas se nos inculca una determinada religión y esta nos inculca que debemos respetar lo que nos diga el marido, debemos atenderlo
de la mejor forma, cuidar el hogar a los hijos, que los anticonceptivos no es correcto que los usen las mujeres casadas con sus maridos, que debemos tener todos los hijos de Dios nos envíe, en fin la religión enseña a la mujer a ser sumisa con el marido.

En la sociedad nicaragüense la religión tiene gran influencia y por eso es un factor muy difícil de vencer, hace que como adolescentes y jóvenes tengamos una doble moral porque debemos comportarnos de cierta forma delante de nuestros padres y el resto de la sociedad pero lo que en realidad hacemos y somos es muy diferente (10.3:20).

20 Francis Martinez: Claro que la educación de los padres tienen que ver con el problema de hablar de sexo porque aunque los padres que tuvieron educación hablan con los hijos eso significa que probablemente ellos estén dando mala información de sexualidad a sus hijos ya que ellos no recibieron educación sexual (10.3:20)

21 Francis Martinez: Esta situación quizás ocurra en casos cuando una chica tenga que ser aceptada dentro de un círculo o grupo de amigos, es decir que para pertenecer a un grupo los amigos te preguntan si ya has tenido relaciones sexuales y en muchos casos te dicen que estas fuera de moda si todavía no has tenido relaciones sexuales.

22 Francis Martinez: Desde la niñez se puede observar que la sociedad inculca el papel que tienen el hombre y la mujer en la sociedad, al niño solo se le permite jugar con soldados, carritos, pelota y a la niña se le dan juegos de cocina, peluches y muñecas, por eso desde que se es pequeño la sociedad deja claro que el papel de la mujer es estar en la casa. Y en casos en que la mujer juega las mismas cosas que el hombre se le tilda de chimbarona o marimacho.
Quizás durante la niñez no nos damos cuenta de estas diferencias, sin embargo cuando llegamos a la adolescencia notamos enormemente estas diferencias.

“Yo fui una niña a la que le gustaba jugar con los juguetes para los niños quizás porque dentro de mi familia mis papas solo tuvieron hijas mujeres y nunca me dijeron que no debía jugar con estos juguetes. Recuerdo que a una prima también le gustaba jugar con estos juguetes sin embargo como ella tenía un hermano varón el le decía que ella no tenía que jugar con sus juguetes porque solo los varones jugaban con esas cosas.”

Tal vez la diferencia entre ella y yo era que en mi familia todas mis hermanas son mujeres y ella tiene un hermano varón al que le corresponde hacer “las cosas que son para hombres”.

Otro ejemplo también ocurre con unas vecinas que son hermanas, una de ellas tiene un hijo varón y la otra tiene una niña, ambos de la misma edad. Se nota el distinto trato que les dan porque cuando la niña hace algo incorrecto la regañan y al varón le pagan, además cuando la niña llora la conciente y al varón le dicen que el no tiene que llorar porque solo lloran las niñas.

Quizás el trato sobre protector que los padres dan a las niñas hace que ellas esperen cosas románticas de la vida, sin embargo cuando la niña crece le prohíben salir y tener novio, es difícil sobrevivir a estos cambios de comportamiento que los padres tienen con los hijos.

Otro problema es que la educación que recibimos de la escuela es muy poca, conocemos a rasgos generales el tema de la sexualidad, entonces como jóvenes curiosos a los que se nos brinda poca información, recurrimos a aclarar nuestras dudas con amigos que en su mayoría desconocen una correcta información de sexualidad.

Para las adolescentes es más difícil tener poder sexual cuando tienen hermanos varones ya que los padres le permiten al varón
hacer muchas cosas como salir, tener novia, tener relaciones, llevar condones en el bolsillo, sin embargo a la hija mujer no le permiten nada de esto, por eso la mujer se ve obligada a hacer las cosas en secreto y la mayoría del tiempo le miente a sus padres para poder salir de la casa.

En muchos de estos casos las chicas se revelan contra los padres porque no soportan el encierro en que los mantienen y por tanto la escapatoria que ellas ven es tener novio, vivir con el y escaparse de la casa. Muchas de ellas a pesar de saber de los anticonceptivos salen embarazadas porque están enamoradas y creen que la mejor forma de hacer que el hombre este para siempre con ellas es teniendo un hijo. Después la mujer descubre que se equivoco y recibe el rechazo de la sociedad y la familia y pierde su autoestima, de esta forma es mas dificil educar al hijo porque la mujer piensa que nada de lo que haga esta bien y no siente ningun amor a la vida todo le da lo mismo, el Marido, la familia, los hijos y por eso empieza la cadena repetitiva del conformismo que se hereda a los hijos que tienen el pensamiento de que como mi mama o mi papa sufrio lo mismo no importa que a mi tambien me pase... Ellos piensan que les va a pasar lo mismo pues de que su pareja los puede dejar en el caso de las mujeres y en el caso de los hombres no sienten ninguna responsabilidad con los hijos y abandonan a la mujer...

Es por eso que los padres siempre deben inculcar a los hijos que ellos (los hijos) deben ser mejores de lo que ellos fueron (los padres). Pero que pasa que esto solo sucede en pocas familias, porque en la mayoria de las familias los padres no les ensenan a los hijos que la educacion es algo importante en la vida. Es mas muchos padres creen que la educacion es una perdida de tiempo.

Y por otra parte los varones inician sus relaciones temprano porque son presionados por los padres y por los amigos y les dicen que es mejor tener sexo sin condón porque asi se siente mejor y por eso los chicos erróneamente inician su actividad sexual sin la educacion y la protección adecuada y asi es como adquieren las ITS.
Conozco una familia que está integrada por la madre, el padre y 9 hijos de los cuales 3 son mujeres, a ellas la mama les decía que debían hacer todo lo que el marido les diga, en cambio sus padres y hermanos mayores les dicen que ellas tienen que estudiar y trabajar para no soportar los maltratos del marido. Probablemente ellas no tienen novio por eso, porque no quieren llevar la vida que lleva la mama, tienen miedo de que en ellas se repita el mismo patrón de ser sometidas al marido.

En mi caso yo deseo ser independiente económicamente porque no quiero que me pase lo mismo que a mi mama, estar con el marido porque depende económicamente de él para mantener a las hijas, en muchas ocasiones se aprende de ver los errores que cometen familiares o amigas y sabemos que nosotras no debemos repetir lo malo que a ellas les sucedió.

23
Francis Martinez: En las zonas rurales las oportunidades de estudio se dan al varón porque los padres piensan que la mujer lo único que necesita es saber cuidar a los hijos y hacer las cosas del hogar (lavar, planchar, cocinar, limpiar, etc.), con esto ella ya está preparada para formar una familia.

Por eso es común que en las zonas rurales las mujeres tengan hijo a temprana edad porque en estos lugares es prácticamente una cultura casarse temprano (13 -16 años) además por el machismo que existe, ellos piensan que es mejor tener bastantes hijos porque así hay más manos para trabajar y si un hijo muere entonces el nacimiento te uno reemplaza la muerte de otro, todo esto contribuye a que la mujer sea violentada físicamente por su marido y se vuelve sumisa.

En las zonas urbanas son menos las mujeres que salen embarazadas a temprana edad, esto se debe a que son más las chicas que tienen acceso a educación, sin embargo en la mayoría de los hogares urbanos las mamás le inculcan a su hija que tiene que saber hacer las cosas del hogar para estar bien con su marido, esto es porque las madres desean que sus hijas sean más inde-
pendientes pero también tienen el pensamiento machista de que
las hijas tienen la obligación de atender a su marido y las cosas
del hogar.

Cabe mencionar que en ambos ambientes el rural y el urbano so
se le enseña a cocinar, limpiar, lavar y todo eso a los varones, son
raras las mamás que enseñan a realizar estas actividades a sus
hijos y mayormente esto se da cuando la mamá no tiene marido
porque le enseña a su hijo que tiene que saber hacer sus cosas
porque tal vez su mujer lo abandone o ella no sepa hacer esas
cosas y el tiene que saber hacerlas.

24
Francis Martinez: Considero que la mujer tiene poco poder sexual
pero esto se debe a la falta de educación, por lo menos yo empecé
da cuidarme más después de obtener información suficiente sobre
como protegerme de las ITS durante los talleres de capacitación
que recibí en el Club en Conexión, además aprendí que una mu-
jer bajo ninguna circunstancia debe ser maltratada físicamente y
también porque mi mamá siempre nos dijo que nunca nos debe-
mos dejar maltratar físicamente de un hombre.

Otro aspecto que tiene que ver para que una mujer tenga poder
sexual es que los padres nos digan que somos iguales y tenemos
los mismos derechos que un hombre, aunque completemos la in-
formación con otras personas u organismos siempre es bueno
que nuestros padres nos valoren como mujeres y nos enseñen que
no debemos someternos a los hombres por ser mujeres.

De forma personal puedo decir que en mi vida influyeron mu-
chas cosas para que fuera como soy ahora, ya que me consi-
dero una mujer con mucho poder sexual, porque me respeto a mi
misma, siempre esta de primero mi bienestar, soy abierta con mi
pareja hablo claro de sexualidad con él, le comunico lo que me
gusta y lo que no me gusta, tengo un comportamiento serio con
compañeros y amigos pero a la vez estoy muy abierta a cualquier
pregunta de sexualidad que ellos me pidan.
Tengo muchas aspiraciones económicas, personales y profesionales, aprendí a tener una alta autoestima y a respetarme a mí misma, creo que pertenecer a distintos grupos (grupo de danza, ambientalista, grupos de educación sexual) me ayudo, pero también ayudo tener personas que me quieren y desean lo mejor para mí.

Hasta el momento nunca he estado sometida a ningún hombre (excepto mi padre) porque desde el principio les planteaba a ellos como era yo y el hecho de que me gustaba que respetaran mi forma de pensar. Muchos de ellos dicen que aprendieron mucho de mí por eso que descubrieron que no solo deben pensar en ellos sino también en su pareja.”

Al principio es difícil para los hombres tratar con mujeres de mente abierta pero la comunicación de pareja es importante para que ellos aprendan a respetarnos y a saber que ambos tenemos los mismos derechos.

Para tener poder sexual creo que lo se necesita es una gran autoestima, buena educación e información de sexualidad y tener confianza y comunicación con las personas sobre este tema de sexualidad principalmente con nuestros padres y con la pareja.

Definitivamente que otro factor clave de que una mujer quiera triunfar en la vida es que nuestros padres nos enseñen a ser mejores en todos los sentidos y a querernos a nosotras mismas, que nos digan que merecemos ser felices y que nos merecemos todo lo mejor en el futuro además que enseñen a sus hijos varones a respetar a las mujeres. Lo importante es que la sociedad respete de igual forma a la mujer y al hombre.

25

Francis Martinez: Para mi sex and city es un programa que me motivaba para ser una mujer independiente y ver todas las ventajas que trae ser una mujer independiente, aunque no me parece el mejor programa para dar conocimientos a los jóvenes sobre la sexualidad ya que es un cambio muy abrupto el de New York
comparado con la vida de los jóvenes en Nicaragua, ya que para nosotros en Nicaragua es demasiado promiscuo tener tanto sexo libremente como lo tienen esas mujeres, entonces es bueno en el sentido de superación profesional de la mujer pero es muy abrupto para enseñar de sexualidad, además que ellas no enseñan de sexualidad sino de la libertad que poseen las mujeres para tomar decisiones en la vida y como una en el papel de mujer debe soportar muchas cosas de la sociedad machista (10.3:25).

Francis Martinez: Ha habido bastante deserción de educadores debido a responsabilidades que tienen en sus casas o a problemas económicos que los obliga a trabajar por tanto no tienen tiempo para seguir en el club, claro que buscan empleo con un sentido de responsabilidad y de superación que les inculcaron en el club.

Franciz Martinez: Para el tipo de adolescente como era yo (poco sociable, insegura, tímida) haber tenido la experiencia de trabajar voluntariamente en el club en conexión hasta el momento ha sido lo más gratificante, que he hecho.

En primer lugar porque para pertenecer al club el único requisitos es querer trabajar con los jóvenes. Seguidamente se recibe durante casi cuatro meses una capacitación para trabajar con los jóvenes y así reproducir los temas que se aprenden.

Durante se reciben estas clases los nuevos educadores somos capacitados en el manejo de grupos a través de diferentes dinámicas. Y eso es lo que desarrolla en los jóvenes la capacidad de poder relacionarse en grupo y crea más seguridad en los jóvenes.

Además de relacionarme con jóvenes aprendí a conocer realmente las condiciones de vida de gente muy pobre y a entender porque es que se da el embarazo en adolescente, aún cuando existen tantos organismos que trabajan para erradicar esto.
En este particular yo antes pensaba que las jóvenes salían embarazadas porque querían ya que para mí en ese entonces los métodos de planificación era algo conocido para todos. Pero después observé que la realidad no era esa.

Muchas veces sale en la televisión, en la radio y en otros medio de comunicación el uso de preservativos que es el más común. Pero en realidad no se acercan a las personas para explicarle de forma clara y con mucho tacto porque es necesario utilizar métodos de planificación. Muchas veces pensamos que si nosotros lo entendemos los demás también lo deben de entender pero la verdad no es así. Porque eso depende mucho de la forma como hallamos sido educados en nuestras casas, la confianza que han tenido nuestros padres de hablar con nosotros los jóvenes respecto a la sexualidad, y la importancia que le da el sistema educativo de Nicaragua no es bueno.

Desde pequeños nuestros padres y la sociedad nos enseñan que la mujer y el hombre nacieron para reproducirse, se los enseña también en pocas palabras que ES PECADO SENTIR PLACER SEXUAL. Para mí fue incluso algo confuso adquirir estos conocimientos sobre la sexualidad porque habían momentos en que se creaba en mí una especie de lucha entre lo que se me enseñó desde pequeña y lo nuevo que estaba aprendiendo.

Por ello para mí en Club en conexión tienen una buena metodología para trabajar con los jóvenes, a través de muchas dinámicas de participación, implementando juego educativos (lo cual llama mucho la atención de los jóvenes), una vez que los jóvenes han recibido al menos dos talleres se les invitan a cine foros y analizar las situaciones que ocurren en muchas películas educativas en las cuales se presentan casos de enfermedades de transmisión sexual, el abuso de drogas, alcohol, la violencia intrafamiliar, etc.

Hay que reconocer que siempre que se empieza a trabajar con un nuevo grupo es difícil porque los jóvenes al principio miran los talleres como un juego, como algo bueno porque así pasan 1 hora sin recibir clases (que es el tiempo que permiten algunos co-
legios para que impartamos los talleres). Sin embargo a medida que profundizamos en el tema ellos cambian y se vuelven mas objetivos al recibir los talleres.

De manera personal expongo una experiencia en particular. Cuando en una ocasión estábamos impartiendo los talleres en el Instituto Nacional de Occidente (INO), los jóvenes miraban al inicio los talleres como un juego, no ponían atención, se burlaban, pero después a través de las diferentes dinámicas se fueron interesando mas en los temas que exponíamos. Muchos de ellos al finalizar un taller se acercaban a nosotros y nos exponían sus inquietudes respecto a cuales eran los mejores métodos de planificación. Como podían hacer para decirle a sus novios que todavía no se sentían preparadas para tener relaciones sexuales y otras situaciones.

Otro forma como el Club influyó en mi vida fue ya en la relación con mis compañeros de la carrera que estudié. Ya que yo me volví más sociable con ellos y a menudo durante los cortes de clases implementaba juegos educativos con algunos de ellos y empezaban a preguntarme respecto a diferentes temas. Algunos de ellos con el tiempo aprendieron a cambiar su vocabulario al hablar de sexo. (Anteriormente muchos de ellos el sexo lo veían como algo vulgar y de esa forma lo expresaban, pero después vieron que en realidad era algo natural en la vida y que era un tema que con confianza podían discutir con sus novios o novias).

Y de forma personal yo me volví una persona mas segura de mi misma. Menos vulnerable a ser abusada psicológicamente por las presiones que hacen los novios con respecto al sexo (que si no tengo relaciones con él es porque no lo quiero). Para mi la verdadera independencia en mi vida la constituyó el sentir segura y libre de mi sexualidad, poder decir con seguridad a mi novio o mi pareja si quiero estar con vos o no quiero estar con vos. Incluso para mi significa mas que la independencia económica, porque la independencia económica es algo que he podido lograr esforzándome en los estudios, trabajando, pero la seguridad, la independencia de mi comportamiento sexual, de no sentirme
culpable si tengo relaciones con mi novio, es algo que me hubiera sido difícil lograr sin la experiencia de haber trabajado en salud sexual o haber recibido las capacitaciones que recibí.

Para mi uno de los obstáculos de trabajar en el Club es que muchas veces la sociedad no ve con buenos ojos este tipo de proyectos porque sienten que nosotros promovemos el libertinaje entre los jóvenes, la religión es otro obstáculo porque la religión incide en el sistema educativo y esto hace más difícil que los colegios acepten que impartamos los talleres. Especialmente cuando son colegios “religiosos”.

Otro obstáculo es con respecto a la capacidad económica que tenía el proyecto de responder a las solicitudes que nos hacían otros proyectos. Es decir, económicamente el presupuesto solo cubría una determinada capacidad de actividades a atenderse durante el mes, sin embargo los jóvenes estábamos dispuestos a trabajar más, pero para hacerlo se requiere el dinero. Con ello me refiero a los gastos de transporte hacia las diferentes zonas y de alimentación. Para tener una capacitación continua con los jóvenes y no solo dejarlos con lo que se les enseñó, también es necesario incluir en las actividades del Club, en ser multiplicadores de las experiencias y las enseñanzas que ellos tuvieron.

Bueno creo que es en resumen lo que puedo decir de mi trabajo con el Club en Conexión.

10.4 LA HISTORIA CENTRO DE ATENCION Y RECREACION PARA ADOLESCENTES DE SUTIABA

ANTECEDENTES - team Jairo Garcia and Ugarte Williams

1988 – 1989
Un grupo de médicos recién graduados de especialistas en diferentes áreas de la medicina nos reunimos con un objetivo común; analizar la problemática del embarazo en las adolescentes, muy frecuente tanto en nuestro hospital de León (Hospital Escuela Oscar Danilo Rosales Arguello), HEODRA; como en el resto del país.
**1990 – 1992**

Se realizan investigaciones relacionadas al tema del embarazo en la adolescencia en las tres áreas de salud de la ciudad de León, (Sutiaba, Perla María y Mántica Berrio). Las investigaciones revelaron que el problema del embarazo en la adolescencia dependía de múltiples factores; entre los que podemos mencionar:

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15.- Adolescentes sin información sobre Educación Sexual.

16.- Adolescentes sin Alternativas de Recreación. Entre muchos otros.

1993
Se procede a exponer la anterior situación, a las autoridades de salud del país así como a las autoridades de la ciudad de León, con el OBJETIVO de RETROALIMENTAR, la información y solicitar a todas las personas sus ideas o sugerencias a cerca de QUE PODIAMOS HACER ante esta situación.

En base a todo este periodo de consultas se concluyó que era necesario la conformación de una organización que en base a estas necesidades de las y los adolescentes y se les diera paulatinamente respuestas.

1994
Se inicia un periodo de consultas DIRECTAMENTE, a las y los adolescentes a cerca de qué es lo que ellas y ellos desearían que dentro de un centro de jóvenes existiera para que se les atendiera, así como las características del mismo.

Este mismo año se realiza un proceso de investigación en el área materno-infantil de un grupo de investigadores conformado por profesionales de las Universidades de León, Nicaragua y la Universidad de Umea, Suecia; en donde una de las investigaciones abordaba la problemática del embarazo en las adolescentes.

Los resultados de dicha investigación también sirvieron de insumo para la elaboración de la propuesta de la conformación del Centro de Atención y Recreación para Adolescentes de Sutiaba, CARAS.

Se conforman en el Centro Escolar Modesto Armijo Lozano, los primeros grupos de adolescentes, consultándose sobre la elaboración de las normas y estatutos que regirían al centro, así como la letra del himno, la bandera y el logotipo.

Todo lo anterior se llevo aproximadamente un año para organizarlo; finalizando de esta forma la PRIMERA ETAPA, para la creación del Centro de Atención y Recreación para Adolescentes de Sutiaba, CARAS, que no dudo en afirmar que todo este proceso de organización duro en total siete (7), años.
Posteriormente a la elaboración de las normas, el himno, la bandera, el logotipo, se procedió a la elaboración de; LA VISION, MISION y LOS OBJETIVOS del CARAS.

VISION DEL CARAS

Acompañar a las y los adolescentes en su formación integral, con el fin de que estas y estos sean útiles a: ellos mismos, su familia, la comunidad y al país que los vio nacer; colaborándoles en conjunto con sus responsables, a sus principales necesidades bio-psico-social, en correspondencia a su medio ambiente.

MISION DEL CARAS

Emponderar a las y los adolescentes de sus propias necesidades y las de su comunidad, para que en conjunto: ellas, ellos, sus responsables y nosotros; tomando en consideración nuestros propios medios y recursos, tratemos a través de acciones factibles y reales; dar respuestas a esas necesidades. Estas acciones deberán estar concretizadas en cada uno de los objetivos del CARAS.

OBJETIVOS DEL CARAS

1.- Atención Médica Integral Exclusiva para adolescentes y jóvenes.
2.- Atención jurídica “ “ “ “ “
3.- Educación Psicosocial “ “ “ “ “
4.- Atención Recreativa “ “ “ “ “
5.- Proyecto de Vida “ “ “ “ “
6.- Promoción y Proyección Social Exclusiva de Adolescentes para con la Comunidad.
7.- Investigación Bio-psico-social Exclusiva en adolescentes y con Adolescentes.

8.- Emponderamiento Exclusivo para adolescentes y jóvenes.

9.- Búsqueda de la Autosostenibilidad.

1995
El 21 de Julio, a las 15 horas, en el Auditorio Ruiz – Ayestas, de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua UNAN-LEON, se realiza el acto oficial de inauguración del CARAS, con autoridades locales, entre otras:

Dr. Rigoberto Sampson Granera
Alcalde de LEON.

Dr. Ernesto Medina Sandino
Rector de la UNAN-LEON.

Dr. Ofilio Mayorga
Director del SILAIS-LEON.

Dra. María Faget
Oficial del FNUAP.

Dr. Jairo García
Gestor de la iniciativa.

ORGANIZACIÓN ADMINISTRATIVA DEL CARAS

Los órganos de dirección del CARAS, son los siguientes:

CONSEJO DE DIRECCIÓN
CONSEJO DE DISCIPLINA
CONSEJO DE ELECCIONES
CONSEJO EJECUTIVO
El Consejo de Dirección, lo conforman siete miembros; cinco personas adultas y dos representantes de las y los adolescentes y jóvenes, un varón y una mujer. El trabajo principal del consejo de dirección es la toma de decisiones generales, así como de facilitadores de todas las actividades que las y los adolescentes y jóvenes de forma consensuada planifican anualmente.

El Consejo de Disciplina, lo conforman cuatro miembros, los cuatros son; dos adolescentes varones y dos adolescentes mujeres. Las funciones del consejo de disciplina es aplicar por igual a todas y todos los adolescentes, las normas y estatutos de la organización; de igual manera, este consejo es único facultado para amonestar a todos y cada uno de las y los miembros del consejo de dirección.

El Consejo de Elecciones, lo conforman cuatro miembros, los cuatros son; dos adolescentes varones y dos adolescentes mujeres. Las funciones de este consejo es organizar, coordinar y dirigir el desarrollo de las elecciones a cargos de la organización; las que se realizan cada dos años, a propuesta individual o colectiva de candidatas y candidatos a ocupar cargos de coordinadores o miembros de los consejos. [I klubben väljer man cada segundo mes...Silvia och Fred/adminPASMO är dom som styr på klubben: tenemos 4 lideres/som väljs av educadores...tiene que dar talleres och hacer monitoreo, se till att det finns material, dvs ansvariga för att saker och ting sker.... rapporterar till Silvia, comites de disciplina, evento, deporte]

El Consejo Ejecutivo, lo conforman 16 miembros que son; ocho adolescentes varones y ocho adolescentes mujeres, estos se dividen dos adolescentes (un varón y una mujer) por área de trabajo; estas áreas de trabajo corresponden a los ocho primeros objetivos del CARAS, que son: Atención Médica Integral, Atención Jurídica, Educación Psicosocial, Atención Recreativa, Proyecto de Vida, Promoción y Proyección Social, Investigación Bio-Psico-Social, Emponderamiento.

Desde el año de inauguración del CARAS en 1995, en conjunto con las y los adolescentes; anualmente se viene elaborando estrategias de trabajo en base a las sugerencias de todas y todos los asociados, los
objetivos, así como las iniciativas de las y los responsables de cada área de trabajo del CARAS.

Por lo anterior, los meses de junio de cada año; un mes antes del aniversario del CARAS, las y los responsables de cada área se reúnen con todos los asociados de cada área con el objetivo de analizar todas las metas trazadas ese año siendo esa asamblea la que valora lo positivo y negativo de cada programa.

En la segunda semana de junio con todas las sugerencias anteriores los responsables de cada área se reúnen con el consejo de dirección y en conjunto con este consejo se analizan todos los aspectos positivos y negativos de los programas, las sugerencias de los muchachos de posibles soluciones, así como también se analizan las nuevas sugerencias y propuestas de nuevos programas a introducir para desarrollar en el CARAS.

De las anteriores reuniones se elabora un programa borrador de programa, para el nuevo año, el que es expuesto a todas y todos los asociados del CARAS, en la tercera semana de junio para ser aprobado, rechazado o ajustado según últimas sugerencias de todas y todos los miembros del centro.

Finalmente en la última semana de junio es aprobado todo el programa o plan anual que desarrollara el CARAS ese año; los nuevos responsables del CARAS, que asumen cada dos años en el mes de julio, asumen como propio este plan aprobado por todas y todos los muchachos.

**ESTRATEGIA GENERAL DE TRABAJO,**
**DE CADA AREA EN EL CARAS**

**AREA DE ATENCION MEDICA INTEGRAL**

El CARAS, tiene tres clínicas: Atención Médica, Atención Psicológica y Atención de Enfermería, cada una de ellas con acciones específicas con las y los muchachos.
La clínica Médica, ofrece los servicios de Salud Sexual y Reproductiva, Morbilidad en General, EXCLUSIVA PARA ADOLESCENTES, en las áreas de:

Planificación Familiar.
Prevención de las ETS, VIH/SIDA.
Control Prenatal.
Control del Puerperio.
Control del R. N. hasta los 6 meses.
Parto Psicoprofiláctico.
Promoción de la Lactancia Materna.
Inmunizaciones.
Prevención del Cáncer de Mamas y Cervix.
Laboratorio.

Los anteriores servicios se prestan con algunos convenios de colaboración con el Ministerio de Salud (MINSA), en el CARAS, y en el segundo nivel de atención del MINSA o sea en el hospital de León, el HEODRA.

Las clínicas tanto de Enfermería como la de Psicología son complementaria de la atención médica ya que ambas trabajan paralelamente a todas las actividades médicas, en este sentido la mayoría de las consultas médicas son referidas a la atención psicológica; salvo cuando se trata de orientación vocacional que las y los muchachos solicitan la consulta psicológica de forma aparte e individual.

AREA DE ATENCION JURIDICA.
Esta área, trabaja acompañando a las y los adolescentes fundamentalmente a nivel personal, familiar y a nivel de los colegios; en este sentido tratamos que la familia la escuela e instituciones cumplan las leyes del código de la niñez y la adolescencia.

Se realizan acciones de capacitación así como de atención a problemas de tipo jurídico que afectan a las y los adolescentes. Existen los grupos de adolescentes en casi todos los colegios que se le denominan “adolescentes por sus deberes y derechos”; estos receptionan
cualquier queja que este afectando a las y los muchachos para cana-
lizarlo a través del CARAS, y se les de seguimiento, según sea el área
de tipo civil, penal, criminal, ect.

AREA DE EDUCACION PSICOSOCIAL
Las actividades que en esta área se realizan están en función
de satisfacer las necesidades de las y los adolescentes, es así que se
imparten cursos sobre:

1.- Autoestima.
2.- Comunicación Intergeneracional.
3.- sexual y reproductiva, en diferentes tópicos.
4.- Prevención de drogas.
5.- Maternidad y Paternidad Responsable.
6.- Planificación Familiar, ETS, VIH/ SIDA; entre muchos otras
    temas

AREA DE ATENCION RECREATIVA
En esta área se trabaja en diferentes ramas del deporte y se han orga-
nizado equipos de: beis bol, voli bol, basket bol, ajedrez,. También
se trabaja en: danza , teatro y pintura. Se organizan, bailes, ker-
meses, excursiones a diferentes partes del país, presentaciones de
películas de actualidad, etc.

AREA DE PROYECTO DE VIDA
Esta área es muy importante en el CARAS, y colabora con las y los
adolescentes a formular, concretizar y hacer realidad el proyecto de
vida de las y los adolescentes, en este sentido se acompaña a las y los
muchachos para que estos; si solo lograron completar sus estudios
de primaria, se colabora con ellos para que a través de becas se
 capaciten en algún oficio o alguna carrera técnica; estas pueden ser:
Albañilería, fontanería, electricidad, carpintería, mecánica automot-
riz, sastrería, pastelería, corte y confección, así como belleza.
Si ellas y ellos, lograron completar su bachillerato, se colabora
para que a través de becas y exoneraciones de matriculas ingresen a
las aulas universitarias sean estas públicas o privadas.
Actualmente se hacen algunas gestiones en las diferentes câmaras como las de industrias, de la construcción y comercio; para que ya los jóvenes que han obtenido a través del CARAS, sus oficio, su carrera técnica o universitaria, logren ubicarse en el mercado laboral, esto ha sido muy difícil por el problema económico que atraviesa el país y sobre todo la ciudad de León.

[ungdomarna från el club mas libres y los de CARAS mas reprimidos...se le dan de serios...muy formales....nosotros no]

AREA DE PROMOCION Y PROYECCION SOCIAL
Esta área como la anterior es una de las más importante dentro del CARAS, ya que a través de ella, se trata que los adolescentes se sensibilicen ante la problemática que viven los miembros de su comunidad en diferentes ordenes; es así que esta área por normas y estatutos, es un requisito indispensable e ineludible cumplir para poder ser miembro del CARAS y poder gozar de los beneficios que el centro ofrece a todas y todos los adolescentes.

Las áreas de promoción y proyección social son las siguientes:

1.- a niños.
2.- Apadrinamiento a ancianos.
3.- Apadrinamiento a mujeres adolescentes embarazadas.
4.- Apadrinamiento a mujeres adolescentes lactantes.
5.- Apadrinamiento a mujeres adolescentes puerperas.
6.- Apadrinamiento a adolescentes en Planificación Familiar.
7.- Apadrinamiento a personas analfabeta.
8.- Apadrinamiento a niños en su crecimiento y desarrollo.
9.- Apadrinamiento a adolescentes en la prevención de drogas.

Pertenecer a una de las áreas es obligatorio por normas y estatutos, pero el área que se escoge, es por afinidad y deseo voluntario de querer estar en esa área en particular y es por preferencia y escogencia voluntaria de las y los muchachos.
AREA DE INVESTIGACION BIO-PSICO-SOCIAL

El papel de esta área, es realizar procesos de investigación a través de los estudiantes de: medicina, enfermería y psicología de la UNAN-LEON, con enfoque únicamente hacia la problemática de las y los adolescentes. La temática que se aborda es en todos los aspectos que tienen que ver con la vida misma de las y los adolescentes o sea en los aspectos biológicos, psicológicos y sociales. Cada año se realizan entre 3 y 5 investigaciones, las que pasan a ser parte de la biblioteca del CARAS, que luego sirven de referencia a todas y todos los estudiantes de la ciudad de León; tanto de la primaria como de la secundaria y universitarios.

AREA DE EMPODERAMIENTO

Esta área capacita a las y los adolescentes, a través de cursos sobre GERENCIA y LIDERAZGO; con el fin de que estas y estos, por medio de acciones ordenadas de análisis, monitoreo y evaluación, de sus actividades y su entorno; puedan tener una visión bastante clara de la realidad que viven; para que luego de este proceso, en conjunto ellas y ellos se planteen nuevos objetivos, que deberán ser: claros, precisos y alcanzables, para que sean ELLOS mismos los que dirijan las actividades y estrategias que mas convengan en la consecución de sus objetivos. El único papel de nosotros los adultos que estamos trabajando en el Centro, es de ser mediadores y/o facilitadores de este proceso.

AREA DE AUTOSOSTENIBILIDAD

Esta área trata de conseguir fondos con algunas personas e instituciones tanto gubernamentales como no gubernamentales; así como es el área que se encarga de organizar actividades que se organizan entre todas y todos los adolescentes, con el fin de recaudar los fondos que el centro necesita para que este sea autosostenible.
Competing Everyday Discourses: The Construction of Heterosexual Risk-taking Behaviour among Adolescents in Nicaragua