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**THE SEXUAL CONSTRUCTION OF
LATIN YOUTH**

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS

By

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I

General Overview

Study rationale and objectives

If nothing else, the AIDS epidemic has served to highlight young people's vulnerability to sexually-transmitted disease. Not only are they characterized by generally low levels of awareness regarding prevention strategies, but many engage in practices which place them at high risk of contracting HIV. In the face of this danger, the state's principal response has been to promote condom use through the school system and media. However, its efforts in this regard have been effectively stymied by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church, a potent force in Costa Rica, and one which deemed the condom campaign to be immoral.

Given this context, the purpose of the present work is twofold. (1) to analyse the sexual cultures of young people and their impact upon sexual practice (particularly as this relates to the risk of HIV infection), and (2) to propose means of overcoming the impasse between rational-scientific prevention strategies and religious values.

During the course of this study, 'sexual culture' is used to refer to all sex-related discourses (messages) to which young people are exposed, their inherent contradictions, the forms of resistance they engender, and their role in the compartmentalization of feelings and thoughts. Moreover, in order to highlight the discrepancies and contradictions inherent within these sexual cultures, we will carry out analyses in two communities that stand in sharp contrast to one another in terms of their socio-economic characteristics: the first being marginal in orientation ('Villa del Mar'), the second overwhelmingly middle class ('Villa del Sol')¹.

¹ The names of the communities were changed to protect the identity of project participants.

Moreover, it should be noted that our aim is merely to examine sexual discourses, discursive practices and their relation to sexual culture, and *not* to undertake a comprehensive study of the myriad factors that may be related to sexual culture in one way or another. These we will only address indirectly, by exploring their role in changing sexual practices and discourses over time.

Structure of the study

This work is divided into 13 chapters, with the first four being primarily introductory in nature. The first chapter summarizes the major findings, as well as outlining the study's rationale and organization. This in turn is followed by a contextualization of the research, consisting of a description of the participating communities, along with a discussion of sex education in Costa Rica and young people's sexual practices and awareness of HIV/AIDS. In the third chapter, we turn to questions of methodology, identifying specific objectives, providing detailed information on the study sample, research methods, principles underlying the preparation of the interview guide and characteristics of the field staff hired to carry out the study. Meanwhile, chapter four sets out the social constructionist framework that underpins our understanding of young people's sexual cultures. Moreover, this chapter also includes a discussion of the characteristics of discourses, their place in sexual culture and their impact on prevention. Particular stress is placed upon their origins, the means by which they are imposed, their contradictions, the forms of resistance they generate and the effects which they produce.

In chapter five, we explore the bases of hegemonic sexual discourses - religious, gender-based and scientific - as they are internalized by the participants themselves. This in turn provides the necessary grounding for our discussion in chapters six, seven, and eight of the ways in which class and gender impact upon their assimilation by young people. Then, in chapter nine, we examine the various actors and coercive mechanisms at work in imposing and reinforcing the messages inherent within these discourses, while chapter ten encompasses an examination of their underlying contradictions, together with the gender- and class-specific coping strategies devised by young people to deal with them. Flowing from this discussion, chapters 11 and 12 examine the patterns of formal and informal resistance engaged in by young people in the face of prevailing sexual discourses. Finally, in chapter 13, we undertake an analysis of the range of obstacles placed in the way of effective prevention by sexual culture, as a basis upon which to articulate a more effective, more appropriate prevention model.

Summary of findings

Given the continuing impasse between state agencies seeking to promote condom use among young people as a bulwark against the spread of HIV/AIDS, and a church hierarchy adamant in its refusal to sanction any such prevention campaign, the Latin-American Institute for Health Prevention and Education (ILPES) initiated a study in 1994 entitled 'Sexual Culture of Costa Rica's Youth and its Impact on HIV Infection' Funded as part of a larger multi-site project on youth by the Social and Behavioral Studies and Support Unit of the World Health Organization's Global Program on AIDS, its underlying purpose was to explore the sexual cultures of Costa Rica's youth and to propose alternative models for sex education.

Methodology

Adopting a comparative approach, we sought initially to identify two communities - 'Villa del Mar' and 'Villa del Sol' - which differed widely in the socio-economic background of their inhabitants, the quality of their social and physical infrastructure, their economic base and, last but not least, the sexual lives of their youth. Having decided upon two appropriate candidates, the next step entailed identifying a study sample of young people (aged 12 to 19) of both sexes who were long-time residents of their community. A series of quotas were used to generate the sample, with community membership, sex, age, first sexual experience and onset of menstruation (for girls) being the principal criteria employed in this regard. In total, 58 individuals were selected to participate in an in-depth interview, with eight focus groups conducted with 24 additional young people as a way of corroborating the individual responses. Moreover, we also carried out a number of interviews with community leaders, as well as retaining the services of two ethnographers (a man and a woman), who collected information on the lifestyles and everyday realities of young people in both communities.

Conceptual framework

At a theoretical level, the research is informed by the tenets of social constructionism. That is to say, we assume that sexual culture arises from discourses and discursive practices, through which young people come to define themselves and their sexuality. Moreover, situated discursive practices also influence the forms of resistance adopted by young people, which may involve, for example, the articulation of alternative, non-hegemonic discourses. However, by the same token it is clear that there is more to sexual culture than the discursive. To cite but one example, one might argue that the relative wealth or poverty of each community also plays an important role in shaping the development of such cultures.

In present-day Costa Rica, one may identify at least six major sexual discourses. The first three are hegemonic, and these we have labeled 'religious', 'gender-based' and 'rational-scientific'. Meanwhile, the latter three are resistance discourses, and these may be termed 'erotic', 'romantic' and 'feminist'. As these discourses are not the exclusive domain of any single group - though admittedly some derive greater benefit from them than do others - contradictions and resistance are inevitable. Moreover, young people do not assimilate them mechanically, but rather transform them in ways that are reflective of their class and gender positioning. In this way, the sexual cultures of Costa Rican youth are subject to a constant process of (re)negotiation, with class and gender being but two of the variables at work in influencing the particular thrust of their evolution.

Hegemonic discourses

In order to lend some support to this claim, let us consider each of the dominant sexual discourses in turn. Reference has already been made to the power of the Roman Catholic church in Costa Rica, and certainly there can be little question that its hostility to all forms of non-reproductive and extra-marital sex informs much of the population's thinking on questions of sexuality. However, by the same token it is clear that young people do not internalize religious discourses on sex without question. In the first instance, the degree of acceptance varies along lines of class, with Villa del Sol youth in particular showing themselves willing to question and criticize the tenets of the Church on matters such as sex before marriage. In Villa del Mar, by contrast, there is little questioning of religious doctrine. Since the community itself is in a state of crisis, and hence unable to respond effectively to young people's needs and expectations, the latter expect salvation to come from God instead.

Not surprisingly, gender is another significant factor in conditioning young people's acceptance of religious discourses. Female participants, for example, tend to re-interpret and modify them according to the inter-personal relationships in which they are enmeshed. Thus, if someone close to them is revealed to be gay, they will simply cease to acknowledge the validity of the Church's condemnation of homosexuality. Along somewhat different lines, young men tend to use 'logic' as the lens through which they view religious teachings. That is to say, they will accept those rules which make sense to them, and reject those which don't. In this way, if they believe there is no scientific basis for the Church's interdiction against masturbation, they will ignore the latter. However, if they accept the view that masturbation poses a risk to their health, they will simply take the Church's views on the matter as a given.

Turning to dominant discourses around gender, there can be little doubt that the 'traditional' understanding of men and women's roles remains alive and well, despite attempts by young people to modify it in ways that are reflective of their own social realities. Thus, one might argue that while male participants continue to feel superior to their female counterparts, they also believe that they must be compassionate and more flexible with their partners. They are willing to accept the view that women can work, play and study to the same degree that they can. Nevertheless, there are at least three areas that remain forbidden territory: sexual initiation, sexual practice and use of language. That is to say, young men expect women to remain feminine, never to initiate a sexual relation or utter a 'vulgar' word. As for young women, they clearly share many of the same essentialist theories as to why they should be seen as the 'weaker' sex. However, their traditional understanding has been altered somewhat by what one might call a 'gender-specialization discourse'. What does this mean? In short, even as women accept the view that their femininity and child-rearing skills (*inter alia*) are rooted in biology, they do not feel that they should be considered inferior to men as a result.

Of course, gender discourses are also influenced by class. Members of poor communities, for example, tend to associate gender far more closely with the body and physical activities, with differences between men and women being rooted in relative strength and physical power. As one might imagine, adherence to this model demands that women be housewives and care-givers, while men are expected to provide for their families and protect them from danger. Love between men and women is expressed through acts of mutual physical care. In Villa del Sol, by contrast, gender discourses are focused less on physical strength and more on mental processes. Thus, rather than equating male and female with such dualisms as activity/passivity or strength/weakness, there is a tendency to view the sexes instead through the lens of opposing yet complementary 'psychologies'. Within this frame of reference, women are women not so much because of a particular set of physical attributes, but rather because they are

different from men on a mental level. Quite simply, their minds have been inscribed with a distinctly female attitude and personality, just as men have been 'programmed' to be responsible for and protective of women. Among the implications of this gender model is the belief that women and men's mental development (whether through social or physiological processes) produces minds that are in themselves incomplete, and hence in need of the complementarity afforded by someone of the opposite sex.

Not surprisingly, internalization of rational-scientific discourses is also fragmented along lines of gender and class. In Villa del Sol for example, there is a widespread tendency among young people to draw upon the language of psychology and psychoanalysis when defining themselves and those they know: people are homosexual because of their possessive mothers and sex is an art to be learned from sexologists. This is not the case in Villa del Mar. Science and technology enter less into the everyday lives of young people there, who tend to see force as the fundamental determinant of their community's development (or lack thereof). Needless to say, this view is not surprising when one considers the degree to which Villa del Mar's economy has been undermined by the restructuring of the commercial fishery in the area. As a way of coping with the hardships this has caused, young people turn increasingly to essentialism: men are men because of their penises; it does not matter that they are unable to find work and provide for their families. Similarly, women are women because they give birth to babies, with large families proving to the community they are both fertile and productive.

Internalization, resistance and counter-hegemonic discourse

Having briefly discussed the three dominant sexual discourses in the context of Villa del Mar and Villa del Sol, one must now ask oneself how they come to be internalized by young people. As one might imagine, the most important form of 'teaching' is through repetition, with the tenets of orthodox discourses repeated over and over again to the youth of each community, reinforced all the while by professional guardians of the orthodoxy, whose function is both to proselytize and ensure compliance. Moreover, young people who do transgress the limits of the discourse face a battery of punishments, including ostracism, enclosure, exile, stigmatization, violence and abandonment. Thus, most quickly learn (and internalize) the art of *self-discipline*, through self-censorship and invocation of the 'internal watchdog'.

However, even as the oppressive weight of hegemonic discourses is brought to bear upon young people, contradictions among and within the latter serve to blunt their impact. That is to say, each seeks to impose its own 'rules of the game', with individuals forced to choose among varying norms and practices. In turn, these contradictions break up logic of all of the discourses, awakening scepticism and disbelief among young people, and inducing them to turn to alternative discursive practices. Three alternatives stand out as particularly significant in this regard, and we have labeled these discourses 'erotic', 'romantic' and 'feminist' respectively. Significantly, even though the latter advocate principles which differ and contradict with one another, the sexual models they are grounded in are symmetrical rather than hierarchical in orientation. Moreover, it should be noted that, despite being open to manipulation by hegemonic forces (*ie.* the Church, state agencies), the origins of these alternative discourses lie in the grassroots, and hence largely outside of the aegis of state or Church power.

Contradictions between dominant and alternative discourses, as well as within each discourse itself, are conditioned by class and gender. Thus, in Villa del Mar, where young people endeavour to resolve their problems with the tools at their disposal (namely religion and their bodies), religious, erotic and romantic discourses are predominant. Meanwhile, in middle-class Villa del Sol, the power of religion and magic is weakened, with youth drawing far more heavily upon the discourses of feminism and science.

As for the relevance of gender, it is clear that young women are far more sensitive to the contradictions and injustice of institutionalized sexism than are men, who benefit personally and collectively from its operation. However, women do not all respond in similar fashion to such sexism: while those with more resources at their disposal have for the most part internalized the tenets of liberal feminism, poorer women tend to use their bodies to fight sexual oppression, withholding their affection or walking away from abusive relationships.

Sexual discourses and HIV infection

However, as important as the findings outlined above may be, one question remains largely unanswered: how do the sexual cultures of Costa Rican youth contribute to the spread HIV/AIDS within this population? We address this issue in detail in the paragraphs that follow.

Censorship

As has been touched upon above, there are already several sexual discourses in Costa Rica competing for young people's souls and minds. By failing to teach sex education in the country's secondary schools, not only do adolescents have one less tool with which to make sense of their sexuality, but they are effectively prevented from questioning and analyzing the contradictions facing them. Moreover, by divorcing science from sexuality, information on effective means of preventing HIV infection or unwanted pregnancies loses much of its authority, and youth are forced to seek out other sources of information, such as that derived from the prejudices of organized religions.

Internal watchdog

The exercise of self-discipline (the 'internal watchdog') is another means of silencing contradictions and resistance, with young people taught to police their own behaviour, thereby diminishing the need for coercive force. As one imagine, self-regulation of this sort has a negative impact upon adolescents' sexuality, causing them to forget or deny particular sexual experiences. However, if individuals are to develop to their full capacity, they need to be able to learn from past actions and mistakes.

Magical-religious thought

In many cases, the proponents of hegemonic discourses attempt to erase contradictions by demanding that individuals engage in *autos da fé*, in other words that they accept discursive premises on the basis of faith alone. In effect, these moves invoke supernatural explanations for natural events, 'resolving' contradictions and tensions by placing them outside of the human realm and in that of magic-religious thought. However, this serves to discourage logical thinking at precisely those times when young people need it most, for example when they are about to engage in an activity that places them at high risk of HIV infection.

Compartmentalization

Moreover, young people also attempt to address conflicts and discrepancies in sexual discourses through a process of compartmentalization. What does this mean? Quite simply, rather than rejecting contradictory behaviour and values out of hand, they are placed in separate mental categories, where they co-exist in segregation from one another. In this way, behaviour becomes dependent upon the company or situation in which one finds oneself, with individuals losing awareness of the contradictory nature of their actions. Of course, one of the dangers of this response is that it causes young people to undergo radical transformations and mood changes merely by virtue of moving from one locale or situation to another.

Escapism and unrealistic mechanisms for solutions

Escapism is another means by which young people attempt to deal with the proliferation of conflicting discourses. Substance use, music and dance are all examples of escapist activities. However, not only do they risk becoming addictive, but many are co-factors in HIV infections as well.

Conclusions

If AIDS prevention programmes are to be effective, adequate account must be taken both of differences in sexual culture, and the role of gender and class in producing such differences. Inasmuch as each sub-population responds in a distinct manner to particular events and conditions, it is unrealistic to expect a universal prevention campaign to be effective. Instead, each community should have its own prevention programme, with an explicit attempt made to represent majorities and minorities, conformists and dissidents.

Although young people and community leaders are aware of the existence of contradictory ideas about sexuality, they are wrong to assume that these are restricted to the depictions of the mass media on the one hand, and the moral messages of the Roman Catholic Church on the other. Since it is a common feature of all discourses to seek to hide their socio-cultural roots through recourse to essentialism, they are not constructions that lend themselves to ready analysis and questioning. However, when young people are shown that there are different

discourses each with its own 'rules of the game', and that analytical thinking affords them the opportunity to choose alternatives wisely, discourses lose much of their power to command unquestioning loyalty and acceptance.

II

Background

Costa Rica gained its independence in 1821, having been part of the Spanish empire for close to three centuries. At the time of initial contact with the European colonizers, the indigenous population of what is now Costa Rica did not exceed 25,000 (Thiel 1977), making it one of the most sparsely populated regions of Central America.

During much of the colonial period, Roman Catholicism enjoyed a monopoly over the minds and souls of the country's inhabitants, as it was the only religion tolerated by Costa Rica's Spanish rulers. At the economic level, the era of Spanish rule were characterized most notably by chronic poverty, with a lack of human resources and mineral wealth ensuring that there was little in the way of sustained growth at this time. While the country's peasant-based economy did establish sporadic links with the world market thanks to crops such as cocoa and tobacco (Roses 1975; Acuña 1978), it was not until the mid-nineteenth century, with the advent of widespread coffee cultivation, that Costa Rica was integrated into the global chain of commodity production and consumption on a more permanent basis (Hall 1982; Cardoso and Pérez 1977). However, despite the undoubted contribution made by coffee to Costa Rica's economic growth, it also served to make the country extremely vulnerable to the boom and bust cycle of the world commodity market. Still, there can be little question that the existence of an agricultural frontier zone until roughly the middle of the twentieth century contributed to the emergence of a large middle class and to the establishment of a democratic tradition that was interrupted only twice in this century. In 1948, following the second of these interruptions, Costa Rica's government abolished its armed forces.

In this way, the country was able to weave a social fabric in which polarization and anomie were never permitted to reach the levels seen in other parts of Central America, where military dictatorship was the rule rather than the exception. Moreover, the programme of social reform first embarked upon by the government of Calderón Guardia in the 1940s, subsequently deepened and strengthened by Jose Figueres Ferrer's Social Democratic Party, laid the groundwork for a welfare state that put Costa Rica on par with First World countries in such areas as literacy and health. Also in the post-war period, government policies of import

substitution galvanized the industrial sector while attracting large numbers of European immigrants, whose presence contributed in turn to an expansion of the country's ethnic and religious mix. At present, roughly 85 percent of Costa Rica's population calls itself Roman Catholic, while the balance self-identify with a range of Protestant and non-Christian religions.

Sex education in Costa Rica

In Costa Rica, the Ministry of Public Education has attempted to promote sex education in schools through its 'Population Education Project'. However, despite receiving funding - and support - from UNESCO and the United Nations Fund for Population Development, the Ministry has been forced to contend with sustained opposition on the part of the Roman Catholic Church.

Church authorities argue that educational materials dealing with sex education contain a number of 'moral irregularities', and thus have demanded not only that Church views on premarital sex, abortion and birth control be included in the text, but that the materials themselves only be distributed by teachers of religion.

It is against this background that the Ministry of Education has made repeated attempts (since 1995) to produce an acceptable series of sex education manuals; yet even now one can scarcely claim that the Ministry has a viable programme in place. In short, not only are teachers' use of the manuals voluntary, but they are more a teaching aid than anything else. Moreover, even though they contain information that could potentially be useful to all educators, their structure is such that they are used primarily by teachers involved in orientation, home education, religious instruction and science (Valerio 1994).

What this means in effect is that sex education is not compulsory in Costa Rican secondary schools, and that its presence in the curriculum is dependent upon individuals schools and teachers. Of course, not helping matters is the fact that arguments for and against sex education are highly polarized: while those in favour claim that it helps young people to sort out their problems, opponents believe that it serves principally to promote sexual activity. However,

despite the latter claims, not only has research into the matter failed to establish a link between sex education and promiscuity or early onset of sexual activity (Stycos 1987; Madrigal and Schifter 1990), but some have even argued that individuals who are not exposed to such instruction tend to undergo sexual initiation at a younger age, since they do not have the tools with which to make informed decisions (Madrigal and Schifter 1990).

Sexuality and young people²

For a snapshot of Costa Rican sexual practices, consider the following data: 42 percent of births take place outside of marriage; 18 percent of unwed mothers are 19 years of age or younger; almost one half of pregnancies are unwanted; on average, 20 percent of marriages end in divorce; 35 percent of women have been subjected to physical or psychological abuse by their partner; 27 percent of university students report being victims of child sexual assault; and Costa Rican physicians perform roughly 5,000 abortions annually (Madrigal *et al.* 1992; Cover 1995; Brenes 1995).

² Most of the statistical data used in this section, and in the following one, are drawn from Madrigal and Schifter (1990).

Needless to say, these figures are indicative of several key features of Costa Rican sexuality. Although it is not the purpose of the present study to undertake a definitive analysis of the matter, some context is crucial if one is to understand that which follows. With this end in mind, we draw upon the findings from some of our earlier work in the area of sexuality.

In the first instance, with regard to young people's sources of information about sex, the *First National Survey on AIDS* shows quite clearly that, for almost half of young male respondents (15 to 24 years), the street was where most of their sex 'education' took place. The situation is somewhat different for young women, with home (34 percent) and school (26 percent) comprising the principal sources of information for this group. Other sources of information for both males and females are books, magazines and newspapers (seven percent for young men and eight percent for young women), and the mass media (seven and eight percent, respectively).

Moreover, despite the fact that there is no well-defined national policy on sex education in place in Costa Rica, there is nonetheless a high proportion of young people who are receiving some formal instruction on sex-related matters, including sexual organs (90 percent); childbirth, contraceptives, sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs), menstruation and teenage pregnancy (70 percent) and HIV/AIDS (55 percent). Still, it is also clear that much of this instruction is traditional in its approach, with far greater emphasis on biology than psychology, and with little attempt made to speak directly to young people's concerns. Furthermore, because of dominant prejudices, there is a tendency to restrict STD instruction to young males and information about the menstrual cycle and pregnancy to young females.

As one might imagine, not only does this state of affairs serve to reinforce the already strongly sexist character of Costa Rican society, but it leaves youth ignorant of many of the basic elements of sexuality. For example, approximately 40 percent of young people do not know whether a girl is able to conceive after her first menstruation, and only 30 percent of respondents can accurately describe when in the menstrual cycle a woman is most likely to be fertile. Moreover, it is obvious as well that large numbers of young people have fallen prey to sexual myths, with more than half of male and female respondents indicating that they believe masturbation to be harmful to their health and that vaccinations exist to prevent STD infection. Indeed, there are a surprising number of young people (44 percent of males and 29 percent of females) who believe as well that there are special substances which may be used to make people fall madly in love. Of course, given the preponderance of these beliefs, it is not

particularly surprising that many young men and women have their first sexual experience at an early age.

As for the question of whom young people talk to about sex, our research has shown that young men tend to confide mainly in their friends and classmates (64 percent), while only seven percent discuss sexual issues with their parents. Young women by contrast tend to be more communicative, confiding in their mothers (29 percent), husbands (27 percent) and friends and classmates (23 percent). With regard to the level of intimacy in these discussions, one finds that it is generally low between fathers and their children (less than 35 percent for males and less than 20 percent for females), and highest between mothers and daughters, and between male respondents and their male friends or classmates.

Risk of HIV infection through sexual contact

Young people run the risk of HIV infection from the moment they become sexually active. For men, average age of initiation is 16, with as many as 25 percent of boys having their first sexual experience at age 14 or younger. Their first partner is usually a female acquaintance or girlfriend who is on average five years older than they themselves. In the case of women, average age of sexual initiation is 19, and usually takes place with a man who is five or six years older than they are, and who is generally their fiancé, boy-friend or husband.

Only 13 percent of men and 18 percent of women report using some form of contraceptive during their first sexual encounter. As for the incidence of condom use, the figures are even more discouraging: for both men and women, it is practically nil.

In terms of AIDS awareness, although one might argue that the population in general is well-informed, youth in particular are not. For instance, almost half of young men do not realize that an individual can be HIV positive for more than five years without becoming ill, while fully one quarter of them do not know that AIDS is a life-threatening disease. While there is some evidence to suggest that young women are better informed than their male counterparts, it is clear that they suffer as well from a number of misconceptions. Most notably, almost three

quarters of them do not know that mutual masturbation is a form of safe sex (as compared with 54 percent of young males), while 44 percent are ignorant of the fact that condom use lessens the likelihood of HIV infection (versus 12 percent for young men).

Of course, given the latter findings, one is not particularly surprised to learn that only 25 percent of sexually active males, and 16 percent of sexually active females, use condoms on a regular basis. The numbers become even more alarming when one turns to younger women, who are the least likely of all segments of the population to make regular use of condoms. Moreover, among youth who do engage in condom use, almost half report being dissatisfied with them, and indicate that they would prefer to use another form of family planning, were it available.

Taken together, the findings outlined above provide ample evidence in support of a proactive stance on AIDS prevention for young people, and all the more so when one considers the fact that every month 27 percent of males and 17 percent of females between the ages of 20 and 24 take part in forms of sexual activity which place them at risk of HIV infection.

Communities studied

As has already been made clear above, the present study seeks to explore young people's sexual cultures through a comparative analysis of two communities with widely variant socio-economic backgrounds. Having considered several options, we finally decided upon two candidates: Villa del Sol, in the centre of the country, and Villa del Mar, on the seacoast.

Of course, in this regard it bears emphasis that the task of choosing appropriate communities for comparison and study was made that much more difficult by the lack of readily comparable data. In short, not only were we faced with the fact that there has been no population or housing census carried out in Costa Rica since 1984, but, in many areas where useful data are available (such as birth and death registries; use of health care services), they are not available at the community level.

Villa del Sol extends over five square kilometres and its population was estimated to be 8,000 in 1993. Although there are no official figures available that provide details of Villa del Mar's

geography, we estimate its size to be roughly equivalent to that of Villa del Sol, while the most recent population estimates suggest that it had 14,200 inhabitants in 1994. Moreover, according to health clinic staff in the two communities, youth (between 10 and 19 years of age) make up approximately 18 percent of Villa del Sol's population, and 24 percent of that of Villa del Mar.

As for the nature of the communities' economic base, official employment statistics indicate that 20 percent of Villa del Sol's working population was engaged in handicrafts and cottage industries; 19 percent in livestock farming; 17 percent in services; ten percent in trade and sales; nine percent in professional categories; eight percent in the public sector or independent enterprises; and smaller percentages in a number of other sectors, including transportation, management and administration. Moreover, as these figures suggest, the town enjoys considerable diversity in economic activity, a finding that stands in sharp contrast to Villa del Mar. Although there are no quantitative data available, it is clear that employment is for the most part concentrated in farming, animal husbandry, fishing, retail trade, tourism and other maritime occupations. With regard to retail trade in particular, it is focused primarily upon the operation of taverns, grocery stores and clothing boutiques.

While one is left to assume that unemployment is low in Villa del Sol (there are no official figures available), owing to the diversity of its economic base, as many as 46 percent of Villa del Mar's able-bodied inhabitants are out of work. Needless to say, widespread joblessness does not lend itself to harmonious social relations.

How to explain these differences? Without wishing to suggest that this is the only factor at work, it is nonetheless clear that the two communities are characterized by widely disparate histories. Villa del Mar is less than 40 years old, and was established through forced migration from overcrowded urban areas. By contrast, not only does Villa del Sol owe its growth to an earlier phase of (voluntary) immigration, but it has had much longer to develop its livestock farming, handicrafts and industrial sectors.

Turning to matters of health care, data provided by local clinic staff suggest that Villa del Mar's population is far more prone to illnesses related to poverty and unhygienic conditions than is the case for inhabitants of Villa del Sol. Needless to say, sewage and drainage systems in Villa del Mar provide insufficient capacity, particularly in the rainy season, and its health care resources are less than adequate given the needs of the population. Moreover, these problems are

aggravated by widespread drug addiction, alcoholism and family violence in the town, which community leaders blame on chronically high rates of local unemployment.

Although no comparative data are available for literacy, primary school attendance is deemed to be high for boys and girls in both communities. However, one assumes that attendance rates become increasingly divergent in secondary and post-secondary school. As community leaders in Villa del Mar pointed out, a large proportion of teenagers drop out prematurely, owing to such problems as low family income, marital break-up, substance abuse and prostitution.

Moreover, family characteristics also differ for each community. In Villa del Sol, the nuclear family remains the predominant model, with the majority of households characterized by the presence of both parents. This is not the case in Villa del Mar, where a social worker reported to us that three out of every four households were headed by women only. Furthermore, if one includes in this figure families where the male parent is away for extended periods of time on account of fishing or other out of town work commitments, the proportion of female single-parent families becomes even higher.

Also worthy of note in this regard is the wide disparity in religious practice. Despite the presence in the town of ten Protestant churches, it is obvious that Villa del Sol is a predominantly Roman Catholic community. Not only does it have 12 Catholic churches, but saints' feast days and high holidays invariably attract large crowds of devout worshipers. By contrast, in Villa del Mar the situation is quite different: Evangelical and Baptist churches predominate, while Roman Catholic ones are in the minority. While acknowledging that the number of churches is not necessarily the best predictor of number of worshipers, one might nonetheless argue that Protestant fundamentalism is a considerably more potent force in Villa del Mar than it is in Villa del Sol.

Life in the communities

Villa del Sol's rapid urban growth is made all the more obvious when compared with the wide tracts of rural hinterland that surround it. Moreover, trade with this hinterland is clearly of great

importance to the town's economy, as is attested to by the large number of grocery stores (48), supermarkets, mini-markets, and suppliers (30), hardware stores, woodworking and automobile repair shops (96), restaurants and fast-food eateries (45), vegetable and fruit markets, flower shops and tree nurseries (22), meat markets and farm accessory stores (17), liquor merchants (14), bakeries (10), and beauty salons (16), among others.

Not surprisingly, there is far less evidence of prosperity in Villa del Mar. Although there are some paved roads in the town, most are either gravel or dirt. Retail trade employs far fewer people, and contributes much less to the community's tax base: in stark contrast with Villa del Sol, there are only 21 grocery stores, two suppliers, three general stores, one automobile repair shop, six restaurants, and one meat market.

The respective wealth of each community can also be seen in the different types of housing construction. In Villa del Mar, most houses are made out of wood, and many are old and dilapidated. Moreover, where brick homes do exist, they were for the most part built with monies provided by the National Institute of Housing and Urban Development. However, even here the houses are in a poor state of repair, mostly because their occupants lack the necessary resources to maintain or enlarge them. Needless to say, this in turn has contributed to overcrowded conditions, with large families sharing very small quarters. As in other areas, the contrast with Villa del Sol is obvious. Here, most of the homes are of brick and in good condition, though admittedly there are some neighborhoods where housing stock is of lower quality.

Another significant difference between Villa del Sol and Villa del Mar resides in the outlook of community members. In the latter case, people are generally open and friendly. As one walks down the street, one is often engaged in conversation or invited into someone's home. Moreover, its hot, humid climate ensures that people dress in lightweight clothing, and bodies are exhibited with less inhibition. Women tend to wear low cut or halter tops, together with shorts and sandals. Men often go shirtless, clothed only in Bermuda shorts. Boys and girls are generally found barefoot, wearing identical styles of clothing.

In Villa del Sol, people are far more reserved and tend to be distrustful of strangers. They are loathe to invite those they do not know into their homes, and it is difficult as a stranger to make friends or contacts. The style of dress is also more conservative ; bodies tend to be covered up,

despite the warmth of the weather. Most community members are practicing Roman Catholics, with much of the town's social calendar revolving around the Church and saints' feast days and, for young people in particular, around the Boy Scouts or religious youth groups. In short, this is a community whose guiding principles are dictated by the Roman Catholic Church, and whose people are reluctant to cross their parish priest for fear of the social condemnation this may engender.

As for patterns of socialization in the two towns, one is immediately struck by the degree to which men and women in Villa del Mar form segregated, single sex groups, with the beach being one of the few locales where there is widespread mixing among the sexes. Aggression and teasing are common among groups of men. As for women, they are seldom seen in large group settings, since, as one participant explained, 'it is very difficult to communicate with girlfriends because they're usually trying to do you in, especially when there's a man involved.' While there appears to be more interaction between the sexes in Villa del Sol, with mixed groups of males and females readily observable on the street, it is nonetheless clear that they share many of the same communication problems faced by young people in Villa del Mar.

Moreover, the two communities are also characterized by considerable variation in their leisure spaces. In Villa del Mar, the beach and city plazas are by far the most popular places in which to congregate. Moreover, on weekends, young people tend to go to the beach during the day and to one of the town's discotheques at night. In Villa del Sol, by contrast, young people spend most of their leisure time in nearby San José, though some can also be found in one of the town's two local dance clubs.

Turning to matters of sex and reproduction, although little comparative data is readily available, birth registries show that young women under the age of 20 account for a significantly higher proportion of births in Villa del Mar (27 percent) than is the case in Villa del Sol (18 percent), thereby placing the community far above the national average for teenage pregnancies. Moreover, at a purely anecdotal level, it should be noted that one often encounters pregnant adolescent girls on the streets of Villa del Mar, a sight that is comparatively rare in Villa del Sol. Of course, given these observations, one is not surprised to learn that early marriage (either *de facto* or *de jure*) due to pregnancy is commonplace in Villa del Mar, a finding confirmed by project ethnographers, and which stands in sharp contrast to Villa del Sol, where cohabitation by young people is relatively rare.

Sexual contexts

As one might imagine, Villa del Sol and Villa del Mar offer their young people widely divergent possibilities in the sexual realm. In the case of Villa del Sol, its proximity to the San José metropolitan area, with a population of close to a million, ensures that its youth have no shortage of opportunities for fraternizing with prospective sexual partners, whether in bars, discos, brothels, athletic clubs, private parties or movie theatres. Moreover, it is clear that their own community also provides ample scope for socialization, with young people meeting each other at church functions, or in coffee houses, parks and billiard halls. On Sunday evenings in particular, many young people can be found in the city square, where they mingle with their friends and seek out appropriate partners. However, it should be noted that the same does not apply to Villa del Sol's gays and lesbians, who tend to travel to San José for their leisure activities, rather than run the risk of being spotted by someone they know.

Moreover, as one strolls around the town's main square in the evening, one is immediately struck by the number of young couples holding hands or kissing, while groups of adolescent boys and girls congregate in front of the church's main gate. Other popular hang-outs for young people are the town's many coffee houses ('*sodas*' in local parlance), which serve as fast food eateries during the day, and social centres in the evening. Young couples come to chat with friends or each other, while unattached adolescents gather together at the larger tables.

As the evening progresses, couples make their way to the municipal park, which is poorly lit and hence ideal for those wishing to engage in sexual intercourse without being seen. Also popular in this regard is the dark area behind the church, where couples come to fondle one another and have sex.

While Villa del Mar is also close to a large urban centre, the latter is considerably smaller than San José (it is roughly one tenth its size), and hence characterized by significantly fewer social establishments. However, as one of Costa Rica's principal port cities, it does have more than its share of bars and brothels, which serves to reinforce its reputation as a sexual Mecca for those living in nearby towns and villages.

As for Villa del Mar itself, there are relatively few places for young people to meet and interact, and certainly far fewer bars, parks and billiard halls than Villa del Sol. However, the town does have a long, attractive beach; it is used as a meeting-place during the day and a place for discrete love-making at night.

While the above discussion might lead one to conclude that there is not really that much to differentiate the sexual geographies of the two communities, those differences that do exist are significant, and hold important implications for the sexual lives of the young people involved. Particularly salient in this regard is the fact that while Villa del Sol has many well-defined leisure spaces (*ie.* coffee houses, the city square and so forth), in Villa del Sol young people's principal hang-out is the street itself, which leaves adults with little scope to monitor or control the activities of their children.

Needless to say, there are certain dangers inherent in young people's use of the street in this way. Not only is there is little oversight by police or other authority figures, but the threat of violence (including sexual violence) is omnipresent. Moreover, the fact that the street is shared with a large population of pushers and addicts ensures that drugs, including crack cocaine, are always available to those who are tempted to try them. Also relevant in this regard are the large number of foreign tourists who come to the town, attracted by its tropical mystique and 'exotic' young bodies. Thus, there is always scope for young people of both sexes to earn some extra money by providing sexual services to foreigners staying in town. As one might imagine, there are no such possibilities in Villa del Sol, where community vigilance and a suspicion of strangers serve to dissuade outsiders from attempting to proposition or sell drugs to the young people of the town.

In the discussion above, reference has already been made to the sexual anonymity that San José affords to the youth of Villa del Sol. Should they wish to find a gay lover, harass transvestites dressed in drag, or take part in a discrete affair, they need merely board a bus, safe in the assumption that their friends and family back home will never find out. Such anonymity is unheard of in Villa del Mar, where young people can be sure that news of their every move, their every sexual peccadillo will eventually get back to those they know. Thus, there is little scope for girls to practice prostitution or gays and lesbians to meet prospective mates without it becoming common knowledge.

Of course, one of the consequences of this state of affairs is the fact that young people in Villa del Mar cannot help but be exposed to a wide range of human sexual activity. That is to say, not only do many of them enjoy personal acquaintance with child molesters, transvestites, gay men, lesbians, *cacheros*³, pimps and sex trade workers, but they are likely to be more tolerant of sexual difference as a result. This stands in marked contrast to Villa del Sol, where one's sexual predilections are kept well-hidden, and young people are unlikely ever to meet an openly gay individual. Needless to say, the apparent absence of sexual 'deviance' from the community serves to create an environment ripe for the condemnation and criticism of sexual 'others'.

Moreover, in Villa del Mar the home itself becomes a site imbued with youthful sexual practice, a product of the frequency with which children are left alone by working mothers and absentee fathers. Needless to say, not only does this provide young people with the opportunity to engage in illicit affairs, but it also facilitates sexual abuse by family members. This is less the case in Villa del Sol, where the nuclear family remains the norm, and stay-at-home mothers limit the scope for sexual activity of any sort.

Similar differences are observable in the communities' respective high schools. In Villa del Mar for example, where relatively little stock is placed in formal education, young people tend to see secondary school primarily as a prelude to work or marriage (certainly not university), with adolescent girls in particular hoping that it will provide a venue for meeting their husband-to-be, and hence an opportunity to leave their parents' home. As one might imagine, this orientation renders female high school students in Villa del Mar far more likely to engage in sex with their male counterparts than is the case in Villa del Sol. Here, most young women (and young men) expect to carry on with their education beyond the secondary level, and hence are extremely leery of any sexual relationship that may result in an unplanned pregnancy. In this way, both women and men tend to be quite careful in the exercise of their sexual choices, and generally do not establish strong emotional bonds during the course of their high school years.

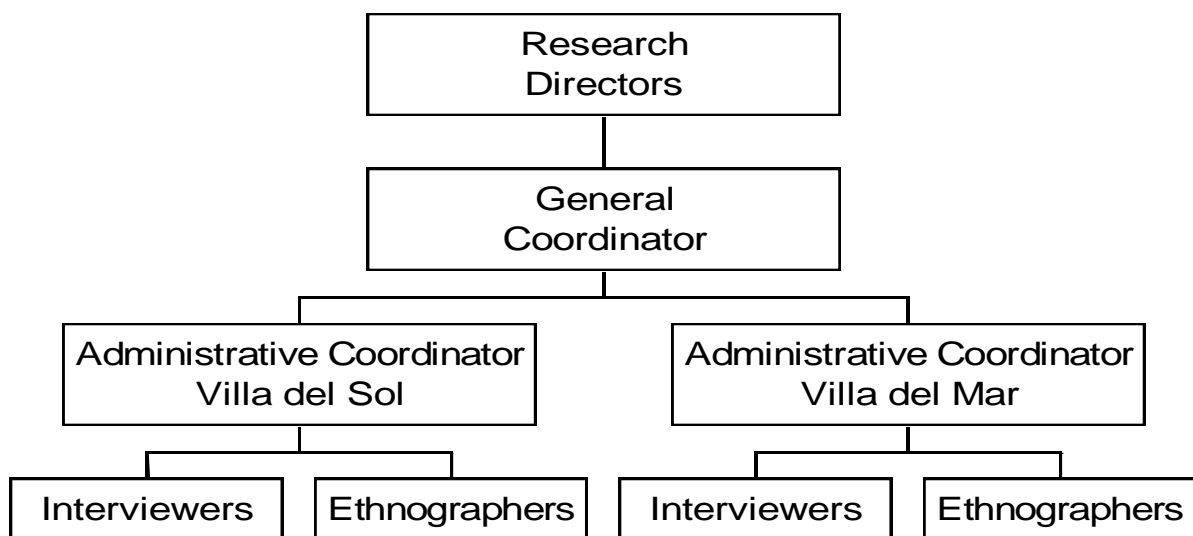
³ 'Cachero' is a term used to describe men who have sex with other men, yet self-identify as heterosexual.

III

Methodology

Organization of the study

Initiated by the ILPES Research Department in January 1994, the present study was undertaken over a two year period, with the final report being completed in December 1995. Figure 1 summarizes the structure of the research team.



Overall control of project execution was initially placed in the hands of 2 research directors. However, given the complexities involved, it was deemed necessary to appoint a general coordinator who would take charge of all aspects of study implementation, including inventory management and preliminary review of the raw data (*ie.* from interviews and focus groups). Moreover, this individual was also responsible for the supervision of two administrative coordinators, one for each community, whose principal duties encompassed public relations, organization of focus groups, and identification of key informants and people who would carry out the in-depth interviews. Meanwhile, ethnographers participated in the day-to-day activities of young people, as well as conducting focus groups and interviews with community leaders.

Specific objectives

As has been made clear above, our principal aim in carrying out this study was to explore sexual culture as learned and internalized by Costa Rican youth, and to assess its impact upon sexual practice and the risk of HIV infection. In turn, this provided the basis for the development of seven concrete research objectives:

1. to identify predominant sexual discourses, whether formal or informal in orientation;
2. to assess the credibility and coherence of these discourses;
3. to explore discourses' contradictions and inconsistencies, as well as the pressures they exert on individuals;
4. based on the above, to assess the relationship between sexual culture and young people's sexual practice, specifically with reference to the risk posed by HIV infection;
5. to develop a conceptual model of the sexual cultures of Costa Rican youth that could serve as the basis for future interventions in the field of prevention;
6. to assess the impact of newly emergent (non-traditional) sexual discourses, such as those associated with the spread of Protestant fundamentalism; and
7. to explore the role of misogyny and sex-based stereotyping in the context of young people's sexuality.

Target population and study sample

Having decided that our target population would consist of young people of both sexes who were long-time residents of either Villa del Mar or Villa del Sol, we set about the task of elaborating a sample of young people (aged 12 to 19) drawn from both communities. This age bracket was chosen because it encompasses the period

when profound changes take place in the lives of young people, including (*inter alia*) first sexual experience and first menstruation.

A series of quotas were used to generate the sample, with community membership, sex, age, first sexual experience and onset of menstruation (for girls) being the principal criteria employed in this regard. In total, 56 individuals were selected, and were characterized by the following set of attributes:

Age	Villa del Mar			Villa del Sol		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
12-14	7	7	14	3	3	6
15-17	5	6	11	7	13	20
18-19	1	2	3	2	0	2
Total	13	15	28	12	16	28

Figure 2 - Study sample broken down by age and sex

Age	Villa del Mar			Villa del Sol		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total

	When did you have your first sexual experience?									
	Yes	No	Yes	No		Yes	No	Yes	No	
12-14	0	7	1	6	14	0	3	0	3	6
15-17	4	1	3	3	11	2	5	3	10	20
18-19	0	1	0	2	3	0	2	0	0	2
Total	4	9	4	11	28	2	10	3	13	28

Figure 3 - Study sample broken down by sex and age of first sexual experience

As the latter table suggests, the majority of young people - of both sexes - had had no sexual experience prior to their inclusion in the sample. However, the nature of the study was such that this did not prevent us from gathering sufficient information about those who were sexually experienced.

Figure 4 outlines the age at which girls in the sample had their first menstruation:

Age	Villa del Mar			Villa del Sol		
	When did you have your first menstruation?					
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total

12-14	5	3	8	2	2	4
15-17	5	0	5	12	0	12
18-19	2	0	2	0	0	0
Total	12	3	15	14	2	16

Figure 4 - Study sample broken down by age of first menstruation

Research methods

Given the importance of the in-depth, qualitative interviews to the ultimate success of the project, considerable investment was made to ensure that they were carried out in an appropriate fashion. Consultants were hired to provide training to the interviewers, and to assist in the preparation of an interview guide.

In addition to the interviews, participant observation was also incorporated into the methodology of this study. It provided a means of obtaining information about youth and their sexual practices in a non-threatening, unobtrusive manner. In order to carry out these observations, project ethnographers frequented the bars, discotheques, beaches and others places where young people gather. Moreover, they also participated in religious, cultural and sporting events, and recorded key details concerning the nature and location of youngsters' activities.

A series of focus groups were also carried out by field staff. These provided a means of obtaining additional information about young people's sexual culture, while at the same time serving to corroborate the findings of project ethnographers and interviewers. In this way, they were helpful in casting further light upon each community's social milieu, as well as the nature of young people's relationships, life styles and emotions.

Preparation of an interview guide

Having drawn up a guide to assist those who were charged with carrying out the in-depth interviews, the latter was subjected to three series of tests: first during initial training of staff; second during the project pilot; and third during the final training workshop (see time table of activities for dates in question).

In essence, the interview guide provided a list of questions on a wide range of topics (eg. religion, gender relations, family, sex, education, bodily perceptions and so forth), whose underlying purpose was to elicit information about sexual discourses, their inter-relationships and contradictions, along with young people's resistance to them. The specific issues addressed by the guide are summarized below:

1. Questions related to formal sexual discourses and their impact on young people (in the home, on the street, at school):
 - 1.1 What is the substance of sexual information and discourses to which young people are exposed in the street, in the home, and at school? What principles, norms, ideals, behaviour and practices do they promote? How do they vary among the two communities?
 - 1.2 What differences distinguish one discourse from another, and what are their contradictions? To the extent that discourses promote different practices depending upon individuals' gender or religion, how might one characterize their variable impact upon those who benefit and those suffer from them most?
 - 1.3 How might one characterize young people's perception of discourses, along with their norms, rules, principles and objectives? How do young people respond to the latter? How are messages internalized and how do they influence young people's sexual life?
 - 1.4 What is the role of such external factors as unemployment, drug addiction, sexual abuse, divorce, abandonment and how do they influence young people's sexuality and their view of the world?

2. Questions related to Christian fundamentalist discourse and its impact on sexuality:
 - 2.1 How does this discourse influence young people's sexuality?

- 2.2 What is the relationship between this discourse and non-fundamentalist sexual discourses, and what implications (if any) do their interactions hold for young people?
3. Questions related to sexism in Costa Rica and its influence on sex education in schools:
- 3.1 How, when and for what reason are sexist discourses established in Costa Rican society?
- 3.2 What are the consequences of sexism? These may include, but are not limited to, sex-based discrimination, sexual aggression, sexual precocity, prostitution and unsafe sexual practices.
- 3.3 What factors are significant in reinforcing or undermining sexism and double standards among different groups of young people?
- 3.4 How does sexism influence young people's view and practice of sex, and to what extent are variables such as age, gender, class, religion, place of residence and education significant in this regard?
- 3.5 What is the relationship between sexual stereotyping, knowledge of AIDS, and the practice of safe sex among men and women?
- 3.6 What could be done to counter sexism and sexual violence among young people, and promote a healthier, more equitable relationship between men and women?
4. Questions related to the inter-relationship between discourses and activities which place individuals at high risk of contracting HIV:
- 4.1 In what ways does practice differ from theory and how do young people sort out the contradictions and inconsistencies which may be inherent within dominant discourses?
- 4.2 To what extent does sexual expression and understanding vary along lines of age, gender, place of residence, religion, and social class?
- 4.3 What factors are at work in inducing young people to engage in, or refrain from engaging in, sexual intercourse? Relevant factors may include, but are not limited to, parties, religion, substance use, peer pressure, sexual aggression, economic problems, parental influence, sex education and myths.
- 4.4 In what contexts is the pressure to engage in sexual intercourse most strongly felt?

Needless to say, the quantity of data gathered during the course of the interview process was enormous. However, rather than attempting to condense the material through interviewer syntheses or the preparation of case histories, we deemed it crucial that the young people be allowed to speak for themselves. Otherwise, we were afraid that the conservative nature of Costa Rican society, particularly in relation to adolescent sexuality, would cause people to disbelieve or reject our findings.

Selection and training of interviewers

Given the key role played by the interviewer in the qualitative research process, considerable time and resources were devoted to the task of recruiting appropriate field staff. In the paragraphs below we summarize some of the issues taken into account as we embarked upon this exercise.

First, it was essential that interviewers be able to display an appropriate degree of sensitivity to research participants. While acknowledging that a post-secondary education is no guarantee of the latter, we felt that, by focusing our recruitment campaign on university campuses, our field staff would at the very least be likely to possess the background necessary to conduct the interviews in a professional manner. Moreover, any gaps in interviewers' knowledge base would be corrected through specialized training.

Second, it was considered likely that the interview process would arouse strong emotions on the part of some participants, particularly if they had suffered sexual, physical or psychological abuse in the past. Thus, as part of their training, field staff (many of whom were upper-year psychology students) were taught crisis intervention techniques and given a list of professionals to whom participants could be referred.

Finally, it was emphasized to us during scoping exercises that young people would be extremely leery of discussing personal matters with fellow community members, and that they would prefer to be interviewed by people they did not know.

As one might imagine, these considerations forced us to look beyond the communities themselves for suitable interview staff. Had we not planned for this contingency from the outset, the costs involved may have been prohibitive, but as it was the administrative coordinator was able to facilitate the process through judicious management of interview logistics.

Activities	1994												1995											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Phase 1: Scoping; Preparation	█	█																						
Training of interviewers		█																						
Visits to communities			█																					
Recruitment of interview participants				█																				
Pilot study					█	█																		
Report on pilot study						█																		
Modification of interview guide						█																		
Modification of project methodology						█																		
Final training workshop for interviewers							█																	
Phase 2: Data collection; In-depth interviews							█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█								
Focus groups										█	█	█	█	█	█	█								
Interviews with key informants										█	█	█	█	█	█	█								
Participant observation											█	█	█	█	█	█								
											█	█	█	█	█	█								

The internalization of sexual discourses by project participants was also addressed in the training workshop, as were the forms of resistance these may engender and their likely impact upon the interview process. Moreover, field staff also engaged in practice interviews, feedback from which resulted in further modifications to the interview guide.

Conduct of in-depth interviews

The first step in project implementation involved publicizing the study in the two communities, followed by a series of reconnaissance visits to carry out ethnographic observation and interviews with community leaders. With the help of the administrative coordinator in each town, key sites and institutions were visited in order to compile relevant data on young people's leisure activities, along with their behaviour, emotions and ways of thinking. Initial probing in the area of sexual discourses also took place at this time.

The first in-depth interviews were conducted in Villa del Mar in July 1994. The administrative coordinator in this community, well-respected for her work in the health sector, made initial contact with young people, as well as explaining the nature of the project to their parents. All interviews were tape-recorded and, as a way of building trust between field staff and participants, men were only interviewed by men, and women by women. Sessions lasted anywhere from six to eight hours, generally broken up into three or four two-hour segments.

Approximately one month later (in August 1994), interviews began in Villa del Sol, with a local secondary school letting us use their facilities for this purpose. As was the case in Villa del Mar, interview logistics were handled by the town's administrative coordinator, a psychologist who was also a resident of the community.

Between July 1994 and March 1995, 56 interviews were successfully carried out in the two towns (28 in each). Significantly, only three individuals (two men and a woman) - all from Villa del Sol - decided to bow out in the midst of the interview process. Clearly, the high level of dedication and enthusiasm of field staff played a key role in ensuring the interviews' success.

Focus groups

On the basis of initial findings from the interviews, it was decided to hold a series of group sessions in order to cast additional light upon a number of ambiguous or otherwise under-explored issues. For the most part, these topics had previously been identified in the interview guide, and were related to the sexual lives of young people, conceptualizations of femininity and masculinity, entertainment and leisure activities, community problems, HIV/AIDS, and relationships with parents, peers and significant others. Moreover, two focus groups of roughly three hours in length were also held with young members of fundamentalist churches in both communities.

All of these sessions were taped. In Villa del Mar, focus groups were held over the course of four weekends in November and December 1994, with men and women meeting separately in groups of ten. Once again, the administrative coordinator was responsible for making all necessary arrangements, including rental of the town's community hall. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the fact that one of the groups was made up primarily of members of a Roman Catholic youth organization, none of whom had participated in an in-depth interview.

Focus groups were also carried out in Villa del Sol, albeit with greater difficulty due to the reluctance of some youths to participate in this type of activity. However, thanks to the efforts of the local project coordinator, groups sessions were eventually held, and were organized along lines similar to those of Villa del Mar. Meeting places included the community's Red Cross office and a private home.

However, it should be noted that, due to the reluctance of Villa del Sol youth to take part in the focus group sessions, we were forced to approach a number of local religious organizations to help us carry them out. This in turn meant that most group members were drawn from the ranks of these organizations, which prompted us to drop the subject of religion, given that the views expressed would likely not be representative of the entire community in any case. Instead, we relied on findings derived from the in-depth, personal interviews.

Focus groups were facilitated by men and women who had previously worked on the project as interviewers or ethnographers. These individuals made use of a range of techniques to elicit

participants' views and responses, with particular emphasis placed upon participatory approaches. Examples of the latter include role-play (to explore men and women's understanding of themselves and each other) and visualization exercises (to identify and make sense of sex-based stereotypes). Moreover, facilitators also asked participants to break into smaller groups to discuss issues such as homosexuality, virginity and gender relations.

We were also interested in determining whether or not young people's behaviour differed when confronted with mixed- or single-sex groups. When the sessions were mixed, we generally found that women were less willing to voice their opinions, particularly on the subject of sex. Meanwhile, young men were most anxious when they were among other males, leading us to conclude that they needed women present to protect them from intimate questioning of a sort that would force them to reveal their innermost feelings in front of male peers.

Interviews with community leaders

It has already been noted that Villa del Mar community leaders were far more receptive to our requests for interviews than was the case in Villa del Sol (see Figure 6), where a local priest spoke out against our work in the area. Among those whom we interviewed were school teachers, church officials (including priests and ministers), bar owners, health care workers, drug dealers, politicians, civil servants, NGO staffers and business people.

**Number of community leaders interviewed in Villa del Sol
and Villa del Mar according to sex**

Community	Men	Women	Total
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Villa del Mar	9	6	15
Villa del Sol	1	2	3
Total	10	8	18

Figure 6 - Interviews with community leaders broken down by community

Transcription and data analysis

Transcription proved to be an arduous task due to the length and number of interviews carried out. Taking roughly five months to complete, from December 1994 to April 1995, the material was entered into a custom-designed data management programme called SAPAC. In essence, the programme allows users to codify and sort information while it is on the screen in front of them.

A team of three researchers engaged in an initial round data analysis, in order to identify the most salient issues and themes. This was followed by a second round of more intensive exploration, involving the 'shuffling' and 'reshuffling' of material as a means of teasing out key patterns and contradictions. Needless to say, the sheer volume of interview and focus group material prevented us from analyzing it in highly detailed terms. Nevertheless, our conceptual framework, discussed at length in chapter 3 below, provided a powerful lens through which to make sense of the data.

Methodological challenges

Given the nature of this study, it is not particularly surprising that members of the interview team were themselves faced with certain difficulties in coming to terms with the subject matter. Not only were few familiar with the concept of social constructionism, but most had never engaged in a truly frank discussion around such contentious issues as male violence and sexism.

Thus, during the course of the training workshops it was decided that, if young people were to speak openly about their sexuality, field staff should be expected to do the same. This in turn provided the basis for a series of candid and often painful admissions by team members as the latter delved into their memories and innermost emotions. Significantly, not only did this self-reflexivity contribute to interviewers' ability to handle difficult or controversial topics in the interviews themselves, but several indicated to us that the training workshops had also helped them sort out problems they were dealing with in their own lives.

It should be noted as well that a number of changes were made to the project methodology once the implementation process had begun. In the first instance, research directors were forced to change the order of interventions, so that the in-depth interviews were held before the groups sessions rather than the reverse (as had originally been foreseen). This decision was taken for several reasons, including most notably problems in recruiting a sufficient number of workshop facilitators, along with young people's initial reluctance to discuss personal issues in a group setting.

Moreover, difficulties were also encountered during the ethnographic phase of the study. In short, while it had been our hope prior to the initiation of field work that the ethnographers would take part in a wide range of community activities, in fact much of their time was spent conducting personal interviews. As one might imagine, this left us with a significant gap in our knowledge of key issues in young people's lives, which we sought to address through a series of meetings with focus group facilitators and the two community coordinators.

Meanwhile, on a purely logistical level, field workers were faced with a series of challenges in scheduling group sessions in the two communities. That is to say, having originally planned to recruit focus group participants from among those who had taken part in a personal interview, it was subsequently discovered that this would not always be feasible, due to young people's conflicting work, school and social commitments. Thus, as a way of resolving this problem, sessions were held with members of already-established groups, such as church-based youth organizations.

As for the personal interviews themselves, there can be little doubt that the delicate nature of the subject matter addressed did not facilitate the recruitment of participants. Young people's reluctance to become involved was especially marked in Villa del Sol, where three individuals refused outright to participate, while others became wary after learning of some of the questions to be asked from those who had gone before them.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that we never successfully resolved the problem posed by Villa del Sol community leaders' refusal to support the project. It is for this reason that field staff were only able to secure interviews with three such individuals; others excused themselves by saying they had no time, or, in less diplomatic fashion, that they simply did not want to cooperate. It is thought that the most influential community's Catholic priest, who was initially supportive of our work but later decided to oppose it, may have been influential in these decisions. Still, this is not to suggest that our field workers faced no obstacles at all in Villa del Mar. In particular, interviewers, facilitators and ethnographers often had to contend with personal safety concerns, given the high risk of being robbed or assaulted in some of the neighborhoods in which they worked. That they managed to avoid being victimized in this way was in large measure due to the guidance and advice provided by our community coordinator, who was familiar with local conditions and well-respected by community-members because of her work as a nurse.

IV

Conceptual Frame for the Analysis of Sexual Culture

Introduction to social constructionism

Social constructionism emerged in the 1970s as part of a wider reaction against dominant Western sexual 'norms', and encompasses a range of theoretical (and political) perspectives. Discussed at length by Carole Vance (1991) in her article, 'Anthropology rediscovers sexuality: a theoretical comment', it is clear that feminists have been among the movement's most forceful proponents. For example, Gayle Rubin has written several papers which explore the notion of a 'sex-gender system', in which biological characteristics and social relations are collapsed into a single explanatory framework, regardless of the fact that they are both driven by quite different dynamics. Moreover, once this is understood, women's subordination ceases to be a mere accident of biology, and becomes grounded instead in the social structures - and systems of domination - that surround us (Vance 1991).

Also significant in this regard is the work on sexuality carried out by scholars like Weeks (1979) and Foucault (1978). To summarize what is admittedly a highly complex set of arguments, these writers argue that homosexuality emerged in the nineteenth century in response to a particular set of socio-historical conditions. That is to say, it was only through the development of modern psychiatry that an attempt was made to ground certain physical acts in an overarching sexual identity (Weeks 1979). Needless to say, the significance of these conclusions was not lost upon those who were working with the hidden biographies of gays and lesbians from the last century. For these individuals, questions regarding the origins of homosexuality had long perplexed them. Have the categories 'gay' and 'lesbian' always existed? If not, when and how did they develop? What processes underlie the imbueing of identical physical acts with highly divergent sexual meanings (Vance 1991).

Through their engagement with these questions, writers became increasingly cognizant of the cultural underpinnings to supposedly immutable sexual categories (*ie.* heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual). Moreover, nowhere was this more obvious than in the work carried out which

explored the relationship between sexual practice and sexual culture in different historical periods (Weeks 1979). Ancient Greeks, for example, made no distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality, only between activity and passivity. In this way, men were deemed 'active' to the extent that they penetrated others, regardless of whether these others referred to men, women or slaves (Downing 1990: p.4). As one might imagine, these findings serve to confirm the view that, rather than being instilled with a particular set of sexual characteristics from birth, human beings acquire their sexual identity through socialization, with sexual culture playing a crucial role in informing and underpinning this learning process.

However, it should be emphasized that the importance of social constructionism lies not merely in its ability to shed light upon the historical dimensions of sexuality, but also in its relevance to present-day analyses of sex, power and the state. How so? In short, the modern era has been characterized by the progressive encroachment of state and para-state agencies (*ie.* physicians, social workers, scientists) into the personal lives of citizens, usurping the church's power to determine who is normal and who is 'deviant' in the process. In this way, constructionism provides a basis upon which to explore the articulation of sexual discourses with the political agendas of a range of social actors, including church and state.

Basic principles

While acknowledging that social constructionism is a broad church, encompassing a wide array of writers and positions, it is nonetheless possible to identify several areas of convergence.

In the first instance, constructionists agree that sexuality is grounded in social factors and not, as essentialists pretend, in the natural world (Vance 1991). Needless to say, this implies a rejection of the notion that instinct determines certain types of behaviour, such as women's 'need' to nurture. This conclusion was reached in the wake of trans-cultural behavioural studies which highlighted the remarkable degree of spatial variance in people's understanding of masculinity and femininity. In short, not only did these studies find evidence of cultural contexts where nurturing was *not* associated with women, but they also documented many cases in which men were engaged in behaviour that, while 'normal' in their own eyes, would be considered highly effeminate in Europe or the Americas (Laumann, Gagnon, and Michael, 1994). Driven by findings such as these, constructionist scholars were led to argue that

individuals' sexual behaviour can only be explained with reference to the particular social system in which they find themselves.

Moreover, closely related to this last point is the constructionist view that any number of subjective meanings may be attributed to a single physical act, depending upon the particular cultural context in which it manifests itself (Vance 1991). Thus, as Gagnon (1984) makes clear, one should be extremely wary of imposing one's own understanding of sexual behaviour upon other times and other cultures. For example, ancient pagan religious rites involving gay sexual practice were not considered 'abnormal' at the time. Along similar lines, even though sodomy was strongly condemned in Medieval Europe, this did not mean that individuals were categorized according to their sexual orientation. In short, before the nineteenth century, any man could engage in sodomy with a woman, man or animal without being labelled 'homosexual' (Weeks 1984). Given the extent to which this view differs from that which is predominant in the West today, constructionists would argue that each culture develops its own means of naming and classifying the sexual and emotional experiences of its members.

Indeed, there are many who believe that individuals' determination of sexual pleasure is itself influenced by cultural factors. For example, despite the fact that gynaecological or breast examinations may involve behaviour that is reminiscent of the sex act, they do not produce pleasure because of the context in which they are carried out. Similarly, most pre-menstrual girls do not consider their breasts to be erogenous zones. Yet, having realized that boys find them attractive, they begin to see them in a different light as well. In opposite fashion, the fact that boys' nipples and breasts are often highly sensitive to the touch is quickly suppressed in cultures where this type of arousal is deemed to be 'unmasculine'.

Adopting an even more radical stance, there are some constructionists who argue that sexual desire itself is socially determined (Vance 1991), citing the degree of variance in what is considered attractive (and hence sexually arousing) over time and space. Indeed, a number of writers have even sought to include sexual orientation in this regard, asserting that individuals' homosexual or heterosexual identity is less the product of genetic predisposition, and more one of socialization. Thus, whereas Western sexual culture has traditionally left little scope for the adoption of alternative sexual identities, other cultures may be far less prescriptive.

Sexual discourses

Having endeavoured to lay bare the social bases of human sexuality, one might now turn one's attention to the means by which sexual culture is internalized, that is to say through sexual discourses. The latter are taken to refer all the ideas, principles and myths related to sexuality which characterize a particular society at a given moment in its history, with an individual's sexual behaviour determined by the manner in which he or she assimilates them.

Moreover, as has been made clear in previous chapters, sexual discourses can either be formal or informal in orientation. While the former tend to be promoted by (and serve the interests of) official institutions, including most notably the state, the latter offer alternatives or challenges to dominant ways of thinking, and are generally associated with less powerful strata of society, including oppositional social movements. As one might imagine, formal discourses include those informed by scientific rationality (whether in the guise of medicine, psychiatry or sexology), religion or the state (through legislation or the public education system), while informal discourses may be rooted in feminism (whether radical or liberal) or in the tenets of romantic love.

Not surprisingly, sexual discourses are also present at the interpersonal level, encompassing both face to face communication between individuals (whether parent and child, physician and patient, teacher and student or priest and parishioner), as well as messages mediated through television, music and the visual arts.

Still, this is not to suggest that sexual discourses enjoy an autonomous existence. Indeed, nothing could be further from the truth, given the extent to which they are constituted and reproduced by the daily 'discursive practices' of individuals themselves. How so? Quite simply, it is the latter - which include anything from the colour of young girls' clothing to male sexual violence - that are responsible for actualizing a particular discourse, and for ensuring that it continues to exist through time. Moreover, it is also through such practices that discourses are modified, as occurs when a given practice is confronted with a sufficient degree of contradiction or resistance in the 'real' world of social relations and social life.

Moreover, it is possible to characterize sexual discourses with reference to the following points:

1. They are socially normative. Discourses aim to define sexuality, govern the contexts in which it is expressed, as well the partners with whom one may legitimately pursue sexual relations. Such discourses also purport to circumscribe their relationship with other spheres of social activity, providing explanations of their overarching purpose and relevance in the process. For religious discourses, for example, sexuality is understood to be part of a divine plan, whereas those rooted in gender expound upon the importance of biology and natural selection.
2. They are coercive. Discourses forbid, discourage and censure all that falls outside of their purpose, principles and norms. Transgressors are punished through a variety of means, ranging from death and life-long exile, to ostracism and silent disapproval. While there may very well be wide variance in the control and surveillance mechanisms available to particular discourses, all exact a price for offenses committed against them, even if the punishment is merely of the self-inflicted variety.
3. They alternate between complementarity and contradiction. As has been emphasized above, discourses are grounded in ideologies and world-views where sex is seen as merely one element within a larger whole. Gender discourses, for example, posit a system of patriarchal domination in which women are exploited in a range of areas that include, but are not limited to, the field of sexuality. Along similar lines, Christian discourses encompass an understanding of life and death in which sex plays an integral role. Moreover, given that discourses also overlap, they are likely to address many of the same issues, including sex, in either a complementary or contradictory fashion. Thus, at the same time that Christian discourses call upon women to devote themselves to husband and home, romantic discourses do the same (albeit for different reasons), thereby generating a measure of complementarity. However, this in turn is undermined by the latter's acceptance of the view that allowances can be made for the sake of amorous passion, something that runs directly counter to the Christian emphasis upon self-sacrifice and chastity.
4. They are not seamless. That is to say, discourses are often characterized by a degree of internal contradiction or incongruity, whereby disconnected elements may very well promote conflicting behaviour, attitudes and values. To offer but one example, rational-scientific sexual discourses emerge from a range of disciplinary contexts, including

demography, sexology and medicine, among others. Each provides its own particular perspective (and prejudices): demography emphasizes age of first sexual relationship, contraceptive use and population growth; sexology highlights the importance of sexual communication, sexual pleasure and orgasm; while medicine focuses upon breast-feeding, STDs and infant mortality.

5. They are exhaustive. Although this may seem to contradict what is stated above, one must bear in mind that the messages inherent within a given discourse are communicated implicitly as well as explicitly. Thus, what is not said is just as important as what is. For example, individuals are left to infer the bounds of legitimate Christian sexuality by taking stock of what is *not* forbidden. Similarly, in gender discourses, men are defined with reference to what they are not, namely women.
6. They are dynamic, undergoing significant change in time and space. Thus, the same discourse may evolve in divergent fashion in two locales, with perhaps the most obvious example being the way in which gender discourses differ widely in cities as compared to rural areas. Time is also significant in this regard, as is attested to by the deep-seated changes wrought upon Christian sexuality in the past two thousand years, as the early emphasis upon abstinence and self-denial were slowly replaced by a less hostile attitude towards sex in subsequent centuries.
7. They are never politically neutral. Inherent within any discourse is a system of power and knowledge, whereby the interests of certain groups are promoted over those of others. In this way, one might argue that every discursive practice embodies a relationship of power, characterized either by the exercise of domination or resistance on the part of the actors involved.
8. They engender resistance. As Foucault (1978) makes clear, power and resistance go hand in hand, with the application of the former necessarily calling forth the latter. Thus, even though all discourses embody a totalizing logic, the latter is always undermined by the counter-strategies and counter-tactics of those who benefit least from them.

Sexual Practice and Identity

As is implicit in the discussion above, discourses play a key role in the construction of sexual identities, that is to say in the way that individuals define themselves *vis à vis* their physical bodies, objects of desire and sexual practices.

How so? At the most basic level, this is seen in the emphasis placed upon defining people according to their sexual partners. However, division of the world's population into discrete categories of heterosexuals, homosexuals and bisexuals is of relatively recent vintage, closely associated with the spread of 'Enlightenment' values in the eighteenth century, and the emergence of modern psychiatry in the nineteenth (Mahon 1982; Weeks 1977). Significantly, before this time class was seen as a far more important determinant of sexual identity. For the Greeks and Romans, for example, all individuals could be placed into one of two categories: active and free, or passive and enslaved. Thus, a free man could have sex with women, men or slaves and still remain a man, so long as he was the one who penetrated the other (Foucault:1986).

However, in the wake of rapid economic development and 'modernization' in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the emphasis began to shift from class to a somewhat broader concern with population, reproduction and the family. Moreover, this period was also associated with the emergence of new sexual discourses that attached growing importance to the gender of one's sexual partners. Thus, individuals began increasingly to construct an identity based upon the sex of their partner, rather than the sexual practices in which they were engaged (Halperin 1991).

This discourse has clearly had an effect in Costa Rica, where self-identification based on sexual orientation is now common among young people, particularly for those living in urban areas. However, this is not to say that it has always been so. Before the 1960s, when the national government began to invest heavily in the industrial sector, most young people did not think of themselves in these terms. Rather, they drew upon the older categories of 'active' and 'passive', with men normally falling into the former while women were associated with the latter. As for men who had sexual relations with other men and were 'passive' in bed, they were thought of as women. Along similar lines, lesbians were categorized according to their relative 'activity' (and hence men) or 'passivity' (women) in the relationship.

Moreover, it should be emphasized that the terms used to describe men and women's sexuality were not the only thing to change in the wake of Costa Rican industrialization (and urbanization). Also relevant in this regard was the growing importance placed upon feelings and fantasies. That is to say, dreams had little or not place in the 'pre-modern' sexual universe. Individuals' identity was grounded in practice; thoughts and feelings were immaterial. However, with the introduction of psychoanalysis to Costa Rica in the 1950s, the ground began to shift, and the mind became an increasingly important site in the determination of 'normal' sexual development and identity.

Still, even as one acknowledges the key role played by hegemonic discourses in shaping each individual's sexual identity, they are by no means the only forces at work. Other relevant factors include discourses' internal contradictions, economic and social marginalization, scientific and technological innovation, as well as the resistance which dominant discourses always engender. As one might imagine, not only are these forces jointly responsible for the delimitation of society's sexual cultures, but it is also through their interactions that the limits of the permissible are established, along with the penalties to be exacted for transgression. Thus, at the same time that the Roman Catholic Church is promoting certain sexual norms and values (*eg.* chastity before marriage), these messages are being undermined from other quarters, including the street (where promiscuity among men is championed) and homes where poverty has led to crowding, thereby making it far more likely that children will witness their parents' sexual activity (and perhaps tempt them to partake of such activity themselves).

Gender, identity and sexual roles

Of all the sexual discourses, none is more important to the development of an individual's sexual identity than those centred around gender. From the moment babies are born, they are defined and categorized according to their sex. Indeed, as Kaschack (1994) argues, perceptions of babies' size, intelligence and level of activity have all been shown to vary widely depending upon the sex to which they are thought to belong.

Given that gender discourses are not closely associated with a particular institution, be it the Roman Catholic Church or the scientific establishment, one may very well be left surprised by their seeming durability. Yet one need only consider the degree to which they have been appropriated by other discourses, Christianity most notable among them, in order to appreciate their continuing importance and power.

Thus, despite the fact that traditional gender discourses may upon occasion undermine the existing social order, for the most part they sustain it, with two of the most significant means in this regard being sexual orientation and sexual role enforcement. As one might imagine, the former seeks to ensure that women and men 'complement' one another by positing heterosexuality as the only legitimate expression of sexuality, while the latter provides individuals with norms as to how they should act, feel and express themselves. Needless to say, men as a group derive significant benefit from this gender system; they also help to sustain it, through their monopolization of the country's political, social and economic resources.

However, it is important to note that gender discourses do not always manifest themselves in identical fashion. For example, community members in Villa del Mar and Villa del Sol differ significantly in their understanding of 'appropriate' sexual roles and orientation. In the former case, men and women are perceived to be opposites, each with their own sphere of influence: the man provides for the family, while the woman takes care of the home. In the middle-class community by contrast, women and men are understood to complement each other, meaning that women can engage in 'masculine' activities (eg. work outside the home), yet still be considered feminine. Moreover, there are also significant differences in the area of sexual orientation. In Villa del Mar, orientation is equated with the active/passive dualism discussed above; in Villa del Sol, it is understood to refer to the object of sexual attraction. Thus, while men of the poorer community can engage in sex with men without jeopardizing their 'masculine' status, this is not possible in Villa del Sol, where they would be seen as either bi- or homosexual.

However, despite the crucial role played by gender discourses in shaping individuals' behaviour and identity, one must be careful not to attribute to it the powers of a puppeteer, exercising total control over young people's minds and bodies. Rather, the bases of the existing gender order are negotiated on a daily basis by Costa Rican youth, who re-shape it through their own interventions just as it re-shapes them.

Still, this is not to say that its demise is in any way imminent. Indeed, nothing could be further from the truth. As our research in Villa del Sol has shown, the existing gender system can undergo change without threatening the fundamental power imbalance between men and women. Thus, regardless of the fact that the women of this community are now able to go to university and pursue a career, they are still the ones who do most of the work in the home, as well as providing emotional support to their partners. In this way, one is left wondering how much further they have advanced relative to their sisters in Villa del Mar, whose work duties do not extend beyond the front door of their home.

Discourses and prevention

Given the power of discourses to shape individuals' sexual identity and behaviour, it should come as no surprise that they also play a crucial role in the transmission of attitudes and values that serve to facilitate the spread of HIV/AIDS in the population at large. Consider for example the case of Latin America's gender order: at the same time that women are roundly condemned should they wish to experiment sexually with multiple partners, men are actively encouraged to do so, if only to provide proof of their virility and prowess in bed. In this way, the extent to which married women are at risk of contracting HIV is more dependent upon their husband's sexual activities than their own.

Thus, AIDS prevention initiatives that do not pay adequate heed to existing sexual discourses (and power imbalances) are doomed to failure, with an obvious example being the condom campaign advocated by Costa Rica's scientific community. From the beginning, its effectiveness as a means of combatting the AIDS epidemic has been undermined by the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand, which challenged the morality of this approach while recommending fidelity as a more suitable response, and dominant gender discourses on the other, which provide women with little scope to ensure that their partner uses a condom during sex.

Faced with these disjuncture among the various discourses, individuals respond in a number of ways, not all of which contribute positively to the cause of AIDS prevention. For example, some respond to the Church's condemnation of extra-marital affairs by engaging in anonymous sex

with prostitutes in public places. Given the need for haste and discretion, measures designed to minimize the likelihood of infection are set aside in the name of pleasure.

Along somewhat different lines, compartmentalization also provides a way of dealing with discursive contradictions. In essence a coping strategy, it offers individuals a means of engaging in mutually incompatible practices or thought processes without calling into question the assumptions upon which their world-view is based. In this way, a young man who has internalized the Church's teachings on sex and sexuality is able to set them aside when he is in the company of his male friends far from home, or in any situation that calls for displays of sexual bravado and aggression on his part. Of course, this only serves to highlight the need for prevention initiatives that are flexible, and whose messages are tailored to the range of situations and locales in which young people's sexuality manifests itself.

Power and knowledge articulated in discourses

As Foucault makes clear, power and discourse are closely intertwined, with the latter implicated in the production (and reproduction) of countless power relations across time and space (Foucault 1978). Indeed, it is precisely for this reason that discourses are so influential in our lives, given that they structure our every thought and every interaction. However, it bears emphasis that the power they wield is exerted from below rather than from above, at the 'micro-structural' level of the home and the individual. Moreover, it should be noted as well that this power tends to be 'productive' rather than 'repressive' in orientation. That is to say, discourses are sustained less through recourse to coercive force, and more through the effective management and channelling of individuals' productive capacities, with Christianity's artistic legacy being a case in point.

Still, in seeking to come to terms with the durability of hegemonic discourses, it is important to distinguish between force and discipline. While it is seldom necessary to make use of the former, the latter is deployed on a more or less continuous basis, both to police transgressors and, more importantly, to induce individuals to police themselves. As Foucault (1978) makes clear, not only does disciplinary power of this sort energize the productive capacities of the people, but it also transforms them into 'docile bodies', easily monitored and controlled.

Religious confession is only one of the techniques employed in this regard. In effect, it 'normalizes' individuals by forcing them to vocalize their most intimate thoughts, with praise or punishment meted out according to the degree to which they accord with pre-established norms of thought and behaviour. A powerful tool of domination to be sure, and one that has been borrowed widely, whether by schools through means of exams, or the psychiatric profession through means of therapy. However, regardless of the precise nature of the information sought, the underlying purpose is always the same: to classify, and hence control, individuals.

How do discourses on sex emerge?

With few exceptions, the hegemonic sexual discourses of the modern era are all rooted in eighteenth century Europe, a period which Foucault (1978) believes to be characterized by a significant shift in the relationship between state and citizen. How so? In short, he argues that it was at this time that rulers ceased to see their people as a collection of individuals, and began to conceptualize them instead as a *population* possessing specific attributes and problems in need of intervention.

Sex was at the heart of this new understanding. If a country's population was to remain economically productive and politically docile, all matters pertaining to human reproduction had to be carefully monitored and controlled, including most notably the means by which individuals exercised their sexuality. In this way, sexual behaviour became both an object of analysis and a site for intervention, with moral and religious exhortations, surveillance by state agents and fiscal measures being only some of the tools deployed to promote family stability and a sustainable level of procreation.

Moreover, it was also at this time that child and adolescent sexuality became an object of 'serious' research. Not only were any number of treatises prepared on such topics as youthful masturbation and its consequences, but the medical establishment became increasingly interested in the study (and treatment) of 'nervous illnesses', laying the groundwork for subsequent elaboration of the categories 'sexual perversions' and 'sexual crimes', beloved by psychiatrists and the criminal justice system respectively. Needless to say, with the deployment

of each new category, new webs of power relations were created, along with the bureaucratic infrastructure necessary to monitor, investigate, treat and confine all those who fell outside the bounds of the normal. Moreover, growing attention was also focused upon 'prevention', that is say developing the tools needed to predict sexual abnormalities (eg. through the accumulation of case histories and the like), while 'educating' the public regarding the ubiquity of 'sex criminals' in their neighbourhoods and cities.

Reproduction of sexual discourses over time and space

If one is to come to terms with the forces at work in producing and reproducing society's sexual discourses, it is crucial that one understand what is being said (and not being said) about sex, who is saying it and when, along with the power relations which condition, shape and mediate these interactions. Why is this the case? In short, as Foucault makes clear, the last three centuries have been characterized by the progressive refinement of technologies designed to shift sex into the public domain, and to institutionalize sexual discourse at the cultural, interpersonal and intra-psychic levels (Foucault 1978).

Among the forces involved in this institutionalization process, none is more important than the state itself, enjoying as it does the capacity to intervene in almost all facets of social life, from the economy to the criminal justice system. However, this is not to say that all other actors are insignificant by comparison, with the Church and mass media being but two examples of institutions intimately involved in the task of shaping and structuring our understanding of sex and sexuality.

Moreover, underpinning the latter's work in this regard are micro-scale processes unfolding at the level of the family and individual. In short, not only do parents, children and extended family members play a crucial role in policing each other's sexual behaviour, but individuals, having internalized the discursive 'rules of the game', are generally adept at disciplining themselves, controlling their desires and silencing 'inappropriate' expressions of their sexuality (Foucault, 1978 a).

Recognizing the significance of these micro-power relations within the larger context of hegemonic sexual discourse, this study will endeavour - following Foucault's example - to analyse power from the bottom up. Thus, by paying attention to the means by which young people learn discourses, how they internalize them, and how they contribute to their reproduction, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the particular relationship between the micro-scale and generalized systems of oppression (eg. along lines of gender or class). Of course, in undertaking this project, it is critical that one avoid positing a binary opposition between oppressors and oppressed. Instead, power should be understood as de-centred and ubiquitous, flowing through individuals, families and institutions in constantly shifting terms.

Discourse internalization

As one might imagine, feedback is integral to the process of discourse internalization, with the latter serving to foster a sexual culture which is itself implicated in the reproduction of hegemonic sexual discourses. Indeed, it is precisely in this way that sexualities come to be reflective of dominant societal values and thought processes.

At the most basic level, children 'learn' sexuality under the guidance of their parents and families, who draw upon techniques ranging from repetition to '*autos da fé*' in order to inculcate them with an appropriate sexual outlook and value system. As for cases where these interventions fail to have their desired effect, more coercive methods are used, including manipulation, abandonment, physical assault and - last but certainly not least - induced confession.

For Foucault, confession has long been one of the principal means by which dominant sexual values are communicated and enforced (Foucault 1978). Still, this is not to say that the institution has remained unchanged over the centuries. Originally deployed only in the context of penitence and absolution, since the eighteenth century it has become a key element within any number of structured relationships, with notable examples including teachers and pupils, doctors and patients, judges and defendants.

Thus, as way of summary, one might argue that successful discourse learning depends firstly upon the elaboration of a sexual culture that is reflective of the discourse in question, and secondly upon the structuring of individuals' consciences in a manner that renders them amenable to the internalization of the latter.

How are discourses imposed?

Still, knowledge of the content of a given sexual discourse is in itself no guarantee that individuals will engage in behaviour that is compatible with it. Rather, its precepts must be anchored in each person's mind through a number of structuring mechanisms. While acknowledging that there are many such mechanisms at work within each individual, we touch upon five of the most important below.

1. **Repression** is used as a way of erasing or silencing deviant thoughts (eg. feelings of pleasure when imagining violent sex) and memories (eg. homosexual attractions).
2. Having been taught as children to feel **fear** in the face of 'inappropriate' expressions of sexuality, individuals learn to associate particular acts and thoughts with the sense that they are in imminent physical danger.
3. **Shame** is another programmed response that is routinely invoked in individuals who think they have acted in an undignified manner or improperly exposed their body. This latter point is especially significant, underlining as it does the radical separation of the body into public and private domains, with the latter being associated with desire and all things dirty and base.
4. Along similar lines, **guilt** has also come to be closely associated with sexuality. Essentially a means of enforcing conformity, it induces us to act as our own judge, jury and executioner, all the while forestalling inappropriate behaviour by reminding us the punishment that awaits us at the hands of our parents, our teachers, or God himself.

5. An individual feels **disgust** when he or she inadvertently swallows something repulsive, with the judgement, 'this is not edible' blending into a frantic shout of 'I must purge myself of it!' In matters of sexuality, this defence mechanism provides the basis for the rejection of certain acts and practices, particularly those of an oral or anal nature. Society's message is clear: 'if you do not manage to steer clear of these impulses, you'll have to spit and vomit'.

In this way, one might argue that discourse internalization is to a significant degree dependent upon processes of association, whereby certain social practices become articulated with basic physiological responses to unpleasant situations. Needless to say, not only does this serve to naturalize socially-constructed categories and values, but it serves to reinforce - in highly evocative terms - societal aversion to 'deviant' sexual practices.

Contradictions inherent within sexual discourses

As we have sought to argue above, power presupposes resistance. That is to say, to the extent that power relations are imbued with the desire to dominate or compel obedience, they will inevitably call forth counter-strategies and counter-tactics on the part of dominated groups. Although the latter may take on any number of forms, one means of resistance involves the promotion of alternative discourses based upon premises that contradict those of their hegemonic counterparts.

From this perspective, contradiction serves to create a link between two discursive proposals whereby the verity of one demands the falsity of the other, as both cannot co-exist at the same time. How so? On the one hand, there are cases where individuals are called upon to adhere to opposing requirements, for example to refrain from sex prior to marriage (Christian discourse), and to become sexually active at an early age (street discourse).

On the other hand, there may also be a contradiction between discourses' requirements and individuals' capacity to fulfill them. This is often seen in poor neighbourhoods where people

have internalized the ideal of a permanent and lifelong marriage, yet their level of social and economic marginalization is such that they have no way of realizing this goal. In the event, psychological and material resources play a key role in shaping each person's response to discursive contradiction, with higher self-esteem and a more favourable socio-economic status greatly facilitating the successful resolution of such conflicts.

Other examples of contradiction include those which arise from a disjuncture between theory and practice. Thus, while both young men and young women are told to save themselves for marriage, in practice only women are expected to obey this commandment. For the most part, boys are actively encouraged to engage in extra-marital sex, whether as a means of gaining the experience necessary to 'satisfy' their future wife, or simply as a way of validating their masculinity.

Resistance to dominant discourses

As one might imagine, contradiction leads to acts of resistance. Although these acts are dispersed in time and space, their objective is always the same: to challenge, to confront, to contradict, to question, and in the process to foster new ideas, new principles, new myths, and new forms of symbolism. Moreover, as makes clear, just as power relations cut across and through existing structures and institutions, so does resistance, with the strategic codification and mobilization of the latter providing the basis for revolutionary action (Foucault 1978).

Of course, for the most part resistance is not codified in this manner, but is rather amorphous and unfocused, manifesting itself simultaneously in any number of sites and ways. In the paragraphs that follow we provide examples of some of the most common forms that this resistance takes.

One such manifestation involves the deployment of 'rational' arguments against hegemonic discourses. These include such statements as 'women should be free to work just like men', or 'cohabitation amounts to the same thing as marriage'. Along similar lines, individuals may seek to modify or re-interpret discursive commandments rather than challenging them directly, as in the case of young people who accept the basic precepts of Christian sexuality while at the same time celebrating the physical pleasure to be derived from the sex act itself. Or, in parallel

fashion, one may cite examples of self-styled Christians who accept homosexuality as part of the human condition, basing their view on Biblical texts which call for tolerance, rather than those which condemn sodomy as an unacceptable evil. Of course, from here it is but a short jump to what is perhaps the most obvious form of 'rational' resistance, namely the formulation of alternative discourses through the development of new religions, new philosophies of life and sex, and new views of the world and its significance.

Still, in making this last point by no means do we wish to suggest that deliberately public acts of resistance are necessarily more effective than those that are implicit or hidden. Indeed, one might even go so far as to argue that individuals' everyday, seemingly innocuous actions do more to disrupt the logic of dominant discourses than do the carefully planned and orchestrated interventions of counter-hegemonic social movements.

Examples of such 'innocuous' behaviour include practices which deviate from discursive norms, such as women who are sexually aggressive, men who are directly involved in the raising of their children, or priests who advocate the use of artificial birth control measures. Of course, there are some who go even further, advocating the creation of support groups for victims of spousal abuse, or the adoption of measures which allow women to take control of their own reproductive health.

Moreover, also relevant in this regard are activities which undermine dominant sexual discourses by re-appropriating physical space for subversive ends. For example, at the same time that Western societies place strict limits upon where and when men can legitimately express their emotions in public (the soccer pitch being one locale where such expressions are allowed), some have taken it upon themselves to challenge these taboos by crying, kissing or hugging other men in spaces that have been typed 'masculine', such as bars, gyms and sporting events. Moreover, similar resistance is also discernable among individuals who have sex in 'illegitimate' locales, for example beaches and school class-rooms, or at 'inappropriate' times of the day (*ie.* during day-light hours). Indeed, time is especially interesting in this regard, given the degree to which it provides the basis for the creation of heterotopic sites on particular days of the year (*ie.* Carnival, New Year's Eve), when 'alternative' sexualities can be expressed without fear of censure or reprisal.

Moreover, one might argue that individuals are engaged in resistance when they partake of sexual practices that fall beyond the bounds of the 'normal'. While sexual minorities provide what is perhaps the clearest example of such resistance, similar forces are at work among

those who seek to re-define sexual intercourse by changing the order of events, or by engaging in alternative forms of penetration.

Finally, resistance may also be expressed in what is *not* said or done. Most notably, this includes individuals who reject the objectification inherent in dominant forms of sexuality by refusing to become implicated in it, for example by dressing conservatively or devoting themselves to religion or study. Alternatively, fantasy may also become a form of resistance, as in the case of individuals who express their dissatisfaction with the norm by imagining how it would feel to be with different partners, or engage in 'deviant' sexual acts.

Compartmentalization of discourses

As we have noted above, sexual discourses, along with the power relations with which they are associated, contribute to the production of a sexual culture which is at once fragmented and contradictory. This in turn forces individuals to control and regulate their sexuality in numerous ways, repressing it in some locales (*eg.* church, school), while giving it free rein in others (*eg.* beaches, discotheques).

As a way of dealing with these widely divergent expectations, the mind 'compartmentalizes' feelings and thoughts pertaining to different forms of sexual expression, causing individuals to become disengaged from themselves and their wider environment.

The Spanish saying 'a saint on Sunday and a sinner on week-days' exemplifies the consequences arising from this type of compartmentalization. Moreover, examples are legion: students who speak out in favour of sexual equality during class-time yet harass their female colleagues after-hours; men who secretly dress as women; priests who enjoy pornography; 'heterosexual' men and women who sleep with individuals of the same sex; or young people who indicate that they understand the importance of always wearing a condom yet refrain from using one with certain partners. In each case, the people involved are able to rationalize their behaviour by simply refusing to acknowledge the degree of contradiction inherent within it. While this may very well help to alleviate individuals' feelings of tension or stress, there are

clearly numerous dangers in fencing off parts of one's life in this way, most notably the risk of disarticulating one's actions from their consequences.

V

Hegemonic Sexual Discourses

Background

As our research in Villa del Mar and Villa del Sol made clear, both towns are characterized by three dominant sexual discourses, namely those centred around religion, gender and science. In large measure, their hegemony can be explained by the support they receive from some of the country's key institutions, including the family, the state, the Roman Catholic Church and the mass media. Moreover, given this level of support, one assumes that they are equally hegemonic in other Costa Rican communities, and not merely those which we visited.

In the pages that follow, we will explore the bases of these discourses as they are communicated to, and internalized by, the young people of Villa del Mar and Villa del Sol. While the issues addressed will be broadly similar in each case, it should be noted that we will be drawing upon slightly different sources of information. How so? In short, while our discussion of gender-based discourses will be based principally upon findings derived from the interviews, our exploration of discourses grounded in religion and science will also make use of relevant textual material, specifically the Catechism and literature associated with the fields of sexology and reproductive health.

Principles of religious discourses

Creation is divine and heterosexuality the accepted norm

According to Christian doctrine, God created Man, Woman and the world in which we live. Moreover, sexuality is seen as part of a divine plan, insight into which can only be gained through study of the Bible and other sacred texts. So what precisely do the latter tell us?

As the catechismal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church make clear, "Man and Woman have been created, which is to say, willed by God: on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other, in their respective beings as man and woman". (Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, par. 369)

Thus, not only did God create Man and Woman, but He wills them to be together, a sentiment that is given voice repeatedly in Biblical writings. For example, in *Genesis* 2:18, God is reported to have said 'it is not good that Man is alone. I will make him a helper that is fit for him.' Needless to say, Woman is to be this helper, whose creation provided the basis for the two sexes, 'each [made] for the other' (Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, par. 372).

Seen from this perspective, it is scarcely surprising that sexual identity in general, and heterosexuality in particular, are thought to be directly traceable to God and His divine plan. This is underscored by the Church's official pronouncement on the subject: 'everyone, Man and Woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity' (Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, par. 2333). Moreover, the implications of this statement are twofold. In short, not only does it serve to remind us why Christian discourses in general are so hostile to change (*ie.* what right do mere mortals have to question God's work?), but it leaves individual priests and others in the Church hierarchy with substantial room to interpret official texts (such as the Catechism) according to their own priorities and prejudices.

Significantly, this variability in interpretation was confirmed during the course of the in-depth interviews, with Marianela reporting that, in her church, she was told that women should 'always be pregnant because they were created from Adam's rib and their mission in life is to have children.' Along somewhat different lines, Kenneth and Santiago indicated that they believe sexual relations to be reflective of God's work and that, as such, their sanctity must be respected: 'if God made them, He must have had a reason.'

Only a fine line separates sexuality from sin

The Roman Catholic Church defines sin as a 'transgression of God's law'. Needless to say, the first such transgression was that of Adam, whose act of biting into an apple from the tree of

knowledge resulted in his (and Eve's) ejection from the Garden of Eden, and the tainting of all his descendants until the day of final judgement. Moreover, within this frame of analysis human sexuality is deemed to be part of God's punishment, whereby Man and Woman's union is subjected to 'tensions', and their relations to 'desire and domination'. Indeed, the only mortal who is believed to have escaped the blemish of original sin is the Virgin Mary, who conceived Christ without recourse to sex (Catechism of the Catholic Church).

Thus, as a result of Church teachings, young people in Villa del Mar and Villa del Sol tend to view pleasure in somewhat negative terms, which is not surprising considering the number of times they have been told that 'sexual pleasure is morally suspect when pursued for its own sake, in isolation from its procreative and unitive purposes' (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 503). Kenneth, for one, emphasized the degree to which Catholics think that 'sexuality is terrible ... all they talk about is sin'. This point was also reiterated by Hilda, who feels that the Church expects her to seek 'forgiveness for everything ... even if I fart I'm supposed to ask for forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness.' Moreover, the overwhelming majority of interview participants indicated that they had received no sex education from pastors, priests or other religious officials.

Of course, the fact that members of Roman Catholic religious orders are themselves expected to remain chaste contributes to young people's difficulty in reconciling sexuality with spirituality. Paula, for example, attended a religious school where the nuns were too 'embarrassed' to discuss sex and, when asked about it, became 'frightened'. Similarly, Jorge indicated that he believed that priests' problem with sex resided in the fact that 'they had to take a vow of chastity'.

Sex is morally debasing

Sex has the power to lead human beings astray and is one of the root causes of moral decay, both at present and in ancient times. Time and time again the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is presented to young people as one of the foremost example of what happens to those who fall prey to sexual depravation. Moreover, as focus group participants made clear, Catechism lessons are full of warnings concerning the corrupting power of sex and sexuality, with Adam and Eve's fall from grace cited as a case in point.

Needless to say, conservative social groupings like the Christian Family Movement are in full agreement with this latter view, arguing as it does that sexual 'permissiveness' is responsible for the vast bulk of Costa Rica's social problems. Thus, if the country is to rid itself of its current malaise, it is critical that respect for 'faithful and fertile love' be instilled in the hearts of all citizens (Christian Family Movement, 1992, p. 26).

As one might imagine, the articulation of sexual practices with the state of the country's well-being is used by priests and other religious officials as a way of discouraging youth from engaging in sex prior to marriage. However, as was made clear during the course of the qualitative interviews, in many cases this has had the opposite effect, with Tatiana arguing that many young people have distanced themselves from religion: 'it's become a way of rebelling, sex is the in-thing really, it's like this is the fashionable thing to do now.' Meanwhile, Maikol noted that young people have left the Church because of 'sex, alcoholism and drugs', a view confirmed by Jonathan, who felt that sex was an evil thing that makes people 'go berserk and do dirty things.'

Those who have sex are doing the Devil's work

For Christians, good and evil are forces that wage constant battle with one another on both the physical and spiritual planes. Thus, when a wrongful act is committed, a real figure, embodying pure evil, is invoked as an explanatory device. As the Catechism puts it, 'Satan ... and the other demons are fallen angels who have freely refused to serve God and His plan. Their choice against God is definitive. They try to associate Man in their revolt against God' (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 414).

In the context of the interviews, it is clear that many participants have internalized this particular belief. For example, Tatiana explained her failure to attend Mass for three months by saying that 'I've got a little devil in me.' Meanwhile, Maikol reported that his mother regularly tells him to go to church in order to 'get the devil out' of him.

Moreover, sex is thought to be one of Satan's favourite tools in inducing men and women to become sinful and perverted. This in turn explains why the young people interviewed tended to describe their sexual peccadillos as instances when 'the devil got inside of them.' In the face of

the threat posed by such temptation, the Church makes use of its own battery of magic-religious weapons, including confession, prayer and atonement.

Marriage is a means of avoiding sins of the flesh

Given the tendency within Christian circles to associate unbridled sexuality with the Devil, what avenues are open to believers who wish to express their sexual identity in ways that are consistent with Church doctrine? Certainly, they will find little solace in the writings of the early Church fathers. Paul, for example, believed that abstinence was the only path to a spiritual life; marriage came a poor second in his estimation. A similar position was espoused by Clement of Alexandria, who saw sexual relations as a 'slight epilepsy, an incurable disease ... that is why it's harmful: Man is insane in the frenzy of coitus' (Bullough 1976, p. 198).

However, despite the strongly negative attitude of the early Church, over time its position became increasingly pragmatic, with marital intercourse being eventually accepted as a legitimate expression of human sexuality. Interestingly, many of the interview and focus group participants appear to share the Church's views on the sanctity of marriage, given the extent to which they voiced disapproval of extra-marital sex. While some suggested that the Church's prohibition of such behaviour was fair because 'it's God's will', others simply made reference to their priest's condemnation of the practice.

The purpose of marriage is union and procreation

At the same time that it affirms the sacredness of marriage in the eyes of God, the Catechism goes on to ground the latter's usefulness in its capacity to engender life itself. Needless to say, in doing so it condemns all sexual activities that are not oriented towards reproduction, arguing that 'sexual pleasure...sought outside of the sexual relationship which is demanded by the moral order' runs counter to God's will (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 2352).

As one might imagine, the young people who participated in this study are very familiar with the Church's position on the purpose of marriage, arguing frequently during the course of the in-depth interviews that sex should serve to 'complement', 'unite', 'attract' and 'create love' among

men and women, and that its underlying *raison d'être* was to allow couples to 'have children and establish a family.'

Virginity is a requirement for marriage

Christianity places great stock on virginity. Everyone who is baptized in a Roman Catholic Church is called upon to follow Christ's example and lead a chaste life, in accordance with their status and situation. Thus, while the clergy take a vow of celibacy and married couples one of fidelity, fiancés are expected to 'reserve for marriage the expressions of affection that belong to married love' (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 2350).

However, the requirement that one be a virgin on the day of one's marriage is more rigorously enforced for women than it is for men. This is underscored by the interview responses of men like David, who, despite being gay and a prostitute, said that he would never marry a woman 'who isn't dressed in white'. However, this is not to say that men are completely exempt from these pressures themselves. As Jorge put, both women *and* men should remain celibate before marriage, inasmuch as one 'should give all of oneself to the person one marries.'

Masturbation corrupts

According to the tenets of the Jewish religion, it is a grave sin to waste one's semen, recalling as it does Onan's decision to spill his seed in the desert, rather than impregnate his brother's widow as Levitical law required (*Genesis* 28:9). Although his crime consisted essentially of disobeying his father and disregarding traditional Levitical requirements, scrupulous Biblical scholars have since argued that the condemnation of Onan encompasses a proscription of all forms of semen emission that are non-procreative in orientation.

As one might imagine, it is on the basis of this interpretation that masturbation, together with oral sex and contraceptive use, are considered serious offenses in the eyes of the Church hierarchy and the Roman Catholic Catechism, with the latter proclaiming that 'the deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose' (par. 2352). Moreover, it goes on to argue that 'both the Magisterium of the Church ... and the moral sense of the faithful have been in no doubt and have firmly maintained that masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action' (par. 2352).

To a large extent, interview participants appear to have internalized this perspective, with Gisella indicating that she had been taught that masturbation 'goes against Christian values'. As for Jorge, he argued that the practice should be avoided because 'one is not giving love to anyone, while Susan asserted that it is sinful, and thus should simply not be done.

All thoughts of fornication should be banished from one's mind

According to the Catechism, not only does fornication entail 'carnal union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman' (par. 2353), but it is 'gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children' (par. 2353).

Given this view, it is not particularly surprising that so many of the study participants felt that desire was sinful. Yet, even as they expressed this sentiment, they did go on to make a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate objects of desire. According to Leidy, 'desire is sinful if one is not married.' However, as Alenxandra put it, so long as the woman whom a man is undressing with his eyes is his wife, 'it's not a sin.'

Prostitution is a social scourge

In the eyes of Church leaders, prostitution is an assault upon the dignity of the prostitute's body, to the extent that he or she is reduced to an object of sexual pleasure. Meanwhile, the buyer of sex sins gravely by being unchaste and by defiling his (or her) body (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 2355).

While it was evident in the group sessions and interviews that young people agree with the Church on the sinfulness of prostitution, many went on to temper their condemnation by suggesting that some individuals are driven to the sex trade by factors beyond their control, such as 'the need to feed their children'; 'lack of education'; 'helplessness', or 'being abandoned by her man.'

Pornography is a serious offense

A similarly negative attitude pervades the Church's views on pornography. As the Catechism makes clear, the latter involves the removal of 'sexual acts from the intimacy of partners in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It is an offense to chastity because it perverts the conjugal act ... it does grave injury to the dignity of those who participate in it' (par. 2354).

A significant number of participants agreed that watching pornographic films was sinful, all the while explaining their refusal to watch them by saying they wanted 'to avoid sin', 'to respect their religion', or 'to avoid divine punishment.'

Homosexuality is unnatural

Defining homosexuality as 'relations between men or women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex' (par. 2357) the Roman Catholic Catechism goes on to make the following claims about it: homosexuality has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries ... Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture ... (Gen. 19, 1-29 Rom; Co 6, 1 Tm, 1, 10), tradition has always declared that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to the natural law. They are an affront to the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from genuine affective or sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved" (par. 2357).

During the course of the in-depth interviews, a number of young people came forward to express their disdain for homosexuality. Kenneth, for example, indicated that 'God didn't make the penis and balls to go into the anus, which is for getting rid of bodily waste.' Alexandra agreed, saying that 'God made Man and Woman to complement each other.' Even David, who is himself gay, said that 'homosexuality should not exist on earth...God made Man and Woman to be together and I chose the wrong path".

Adultery is a serious offense

The Roman Catholic Church takes adultery very seriously, if religious writings and sacred texts are anything to go by. According to *Matthew* 5:27-28, Christ condemned all forms of adultery, even that of mere desire. Along similar lines, the sixth commandment forbids adultery absolutely (cf. Mt 5, 32; 19,6 mc 10,11; Co 6, 9-10), while the prophets denounced the practice as akin to the sin of idolatry (cf. Os 2,7; jr 5,7;13,27)" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 2380).

For the most part, young people share this view, and deem the practice to be a serious offense against the sanctity of marriage. To cite but two examples, Susana argued that it is 'one of the worse calamities facing religion', while Carlos saw its prevalence as 'proof of the decline in religious values.'

Divorce is contrary to divine law

As Church writings make clear, 'the Lord Jesus insisted that the Creator's original intention was for marriage to be indissoluble (cf. Mt 5, 31-32; 19, 3-9; Mc 10,9; Lc 16, 18; Co 7, 10-11). This in turn has led the framers of the Catechism to argue that no human power other than death can legitimately break up a ratified and consummated marriage among individuals who have been baptized (par. 2382).

Needless to say, young people showed themselves to be very familiar with the Church's prohibition of divorce. Tatiana, for one, argued that 'it does not matter how many divorce papers a couple gets, as far as the Church is concerned they're still married.' As for Maria, she felt that, since the institution of marriage is derived ultimately from God, couples should take to heart the saying 'til death do us part.'

Children should not be avoided

As for matters of family planning, the Catechism is quite explicit in its condemnation of 'morally unacceptable means' of preventing pregnancy, such as sterilization and the use of oral contraceptives (par. 2399). Moreover, interview and focus group participants were clearly well-versed in current debates on the subject, with Vanessa indicating that she knew that the Church was against family planning 'because having children is a privilege that one should not be deprived of.' Meanwhile, both Jorge and Guillermo are familiar with the conflict between Church and state over the distribution of sex education material in schools, and know that the Roman Catholic hierarchy 'opposes condoms and other methods of family planning.'

Abortion is murder

In the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, 'human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person, among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life (cf. CDF, *Donum Vitae*, 1, 1) Since the first century, the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every produced abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable' (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 2271).

Clearly, most of the young people interviewed were equally opposed to abortion in all of its forms. In short, abortion and murder were deemed to be one and the same, with the only exception being cases where the mother's life was in danger. As Maria put it, 'abortion should only be considered if the mother risks dying herself, since the child is unborn and what could a child do without its mother?'

Principles of gender discourses

In Costa Rica, religious discourses are complemented by those of gender. Although one might argue that the latter's roots are considerably more diverse than the former, given the degree to which misogyny and sex-based inequity are common strands throughout the Western world, it is clear that the two discourses reinforce one another in reproducing a particular understanding of human sexuality.

Sexual roles are determined by organs, instinct and hormones

Within this frame of reference, masculinity and femininity are determined by the presence or absence of a penis. This is confirmed by Jonathan, who asserted during the course of our interview with him, 'I am masculine because I have a penis, let's say women are feminine because they have a vagina.' Moreover, being in possession of a penis is thought to render one more aggressive and sex-driven. Thus, not only did Danny and Juan argue that they were 'stronger' because of their penis, but Susana indicated that she thought women were weaker due to the presence of female hormones in their bodies.

Indeed, the importance of hormones cannot be understated in this regard, given the significance attributed to them by study participants. All in all, the vast majority of young people interviewed indicated that they thought hormones, along with instinct and sexual organs, were key determinants of masculine and feminine behaviour.

Sex roles are grounded in biology

In light of the discussion above, it is not particularly surprising that most of the research participants (whether male or female) believed that men, by virtue of their sex, were naturally strong, aggressive, assertive and hard-working, whereas women were submissive, passive, vain and delicate. In Katia's words, 'it's simply natural that this is the case.'

Role determines function

Along similar lines, many of the young people involved in the study indicated that women's natural environment is the home, while that of men is the (waged) work-place and the street. In the focus group session, mention was often made of the importance of girls getting married in order to bear and raise children, and of men going to work to support their families. Moreover, several female participants stated that women's nurturing skills were grounded in biology, with Rosangela and Wendy in particular saying that girls' fondness for dolls was innate, the product of menstruation which serves to render them more sensitive and care-oriented.

Man/Woman, active/passive

In the minds of most study participants, men are active by nature whereas women are passive, with activity and passivity measured according to one's ability to penetrate others. Thus, since it is only men who are in possession of a penetrative sexual organ, not only does it follow (in the peculiar logic of dominant gender discourses) that men should be more sexually active than women, but that it is better to penetrate than to be penetrated.

This is underscored by the views expressed by Kenneth, who believes that women who agree to have sex with him are 'sluts' and that they deserve to be abandoned afterwards. As he puts it,

The first week I hug her, the following week I touch her breasts, the week after that I'm getting inside her and by the following week she's already sleeping with me. In one month the work's all done. It's like arm-wrestling, if she's tough it's more fun because it's more of a challenge.

Moreover, the superior value attributed to penetration is reflected in the language used to describe men and women's sexual organs. During the in-depth interviews, the penis was typically depicted as a powerful and violent weapon: pistol, rifle, bat, bar, stick, machine-gun, club and nail were only some of the words used in this regard. By contrast, the vagina was generally portrayed in terms suggestive of inferiority and passivity; for example, hole, frog, monkey, pit, crater or crack.

Penetrated women are sluts, unless they are married

During the course of our interview with him, Kenneth described himself as a 'male prostitute', since he loves nothing more than going to bed with women. However, while thinking nothing of this, he went on to say that a woman who did the same would be thought a 'slut' by everyone. To illustrate this point he related an anecdote in which

a friend pretended to be drunk, and he started to get all lovey-dovey with a girl. They started to make love, even though she was saying no, and then finally he stuck it in her and she ended up liking it. Later on, when he was telling me about it, he said 'that bitch, what a phoney, she said no, it's disgusting and all that, and then suddenly she's into it.'

Indeed, even women refer to other women who have lost their virginity as 'whores' and 'sluts'. Susana, for one, argued that a woman should only give herself to her husband; if she has sex with her fiancé, she becomes worthless.

Men who are sexually active are manly and admired

According to Kenneth, being a real man entails having sex as much as possible: 'Yeah, I've fucked women in the street, on the beach and at home, though if it's at home I'm always careful to make sure that my mother doesn't walk in.' Meanwhile, Carlos indicated that being manly means being willing to 'eat out any woman's cunt or asshole.' Moreover, he admitted that 'feeling girls up' was his favourite pastime, and that he loves to get together with his friends in order to talk about recent sexual exploits.

Interestingly, not only did most of the other male participants voice broadly similar points of view, but many of the young women interviewed agreed that men should be more knowledgeable about sex, with several indicating that they would find it exceedingly difficult to ask a man out or initiate sexual activity. For these participants, the man should play the role of 'guide' and 'teacher' during the course of their sexual encounter.

Women should never act suggestively or provocatively towards men

Among the male research participants, it was widely argued that women who act suggestively in the company of men run the risk of being raped. As Kenneth put it, 'sometimes the eyes tell you, they say no, but their eyes and their body language say yes. In cases like that, it's okay to use force.' Meanwhile, female participants like Maria indicated that women must be very careful

in how they present themselves, and that they must never go into the street and do things which might serve to 'provoke men.'

Principles of scientific discourses

With the development of modern psychiatry in the nineteenth century, a new discourse began to take shape, one that was particularly useful to state actors as a means of regulating and controlling the social (and sexual) lives of their citizens. Internalized and propagated by such groups as psychiatrists, sexologists, physicians, demographers, sociologists, lawyers, economists and criminologists, the tenets of scientific discourse flew squarely in the face of the assumptions built into religious discourses, and frequently those of gender discourses as well.

Sexual health should be a state priority

From the moment that economists, demographers and sociologists adopted the position that population was a key factor in either facilitating or hindering development, public health, the practice of birth control and the spread of STDs took on growing importance in the calculations of state managers.

In short, it is because of this that the latter began increasingly to intervene in areas touching upon citizens' biological reproduction and sexual practices. In countries where labour power was in short supply, emphasis was placed upon encouraging families to have more children. Conversely, in overpopulated regions, contraceptive use, sterilization and deferral of first pregnancy were encouraged. Meanwhile, at a personal level, the belief that resource availability should determine family size, and that every couple has the right to practice birth control gained wider and wider currency. In the context of the present study, this is seen in Hilda's repetition of such advertising slogans as 'have only the number of children you can afford to make happy,' and in Jorge's comment that 'these days you can't make the mistake of having too many children. You have use the methods available.'

Along somewhat different lines, the spread of HIV/AIDS in Costa Rica, what with its tendency to strike down those who are in the prime of their economically productive years, has induced the

government to become a keen proponent of both condom use and AIDS awareness among the population at large. To a significant degree, these efforts appear to be bearing fruit, given study participants' knowledge of risk factors, and statements by individuals like José that 'there's no question that you have to use a glove when you're having sex, even though it's uncomfortable.'

Furthermore, at the same time that experts (psychiatrists, psychologists, *et al.*) have taken it upon themselves to determine the bounds between 'normal' and 'abnormal' sexuality (with the latter generally including all that is not heterosexual in orientation), the state has drawn upon this knowledge in its own efforts to discourage 'abnormal' sexual practices. Moreover, as the in-depth interviews make clear, it has been quite successful in promoting its views in this area, with participants such as Manuel arguing that 'people who fuck children, rapists, faggots, whores, and drug-addicts should all be jailed.'

Sexual orientation/identity arise through 'internal' processes of psychological development

In short, people are thought to acquire their sexual orientation and gender identity through the interplay of biological and psychological processes. Moreover, it should be noted that Freudian views on the close relationship between parent-child interactions and sexual orientation are particularly prevalent in Costa Rica.

In this way, 'normal' sexual development is thought to lead to heterosexuality, to the degree that relations between men and women are a necessary prerequisite for the reproduction of the species. Should something occur to thwart this process, abnormal or 'deviant' sexuality is the result. In the context of the interviews, this belief manifested itself often, as is seen in the following statement by Alexandro: 'homosexuality is an illness that can be cured, if they want to.'

Sex is natural and produces pleasure

Freud (1917) argues that sexuality is mostly about pleasure; procreation is merely an accidental result. Given this perspective, individuals' repression of sexual desire exacts a price, most

notably in the area of mental health. Thus, to the extent that state and para-state actors have internalized this understanding, sex is no longer viewed in moral or religious terms, but is seen instead as a means of encouraging or discouraging demographic growth.

Women and men have a similar sex drive

In sharp contrast to the gender-based discourses outlined above, sexology is grounded in the view that, despite the existence of certain physiological differences, in no way can one distinguish men and women on the basis of their sex drive or capacity to experience sexual pleasure. Given this perspective, the purpose of marriage ceases to be merely that of union and procreation, as the dictates of Christianity demand, but becomes centred around *pleasure* as well. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that at least some of the study participants have internalized this view, as seen in Lucrecia's assertion that 'men and women should enjoy sex.'

Some techniques must be learned for sex to be satisfying

Sexologists argue that both men and women have rights as well as obligations in sexual intercourse. There should be more to sex than penetration and male orgasm. Rather, the sex act should be accompanied by other forms of stimulation, with the ultimate goal being the satisfaction of *both* partners' needs and desires.

As one might imagine, this in turn has served to widen the field of 'legitimate' sexual practices. No longer is it considered deviant to engage in oral sex or masturbation. As Frederico put it, 'jacking off is normal, we all do it at one time or another, and we haven't gone mad as they said we would.'

Communication is an essential ingredient to good sex

Given this heightened emphasis upon satisfying one's partner's desires, it is vital that couples be able to speak frankly to another, if only to say what gives them pleasure and what doesn't.

Thus, both sexologists and psychologists have come to stress the importance of verbal communication as a way of resolving sexual problems.

Being able to satisfy one's partner is important; being a virgin is not

Couples who remain celibate until marriage run the risk of being sexually incompatible. Thus, sexologists will often recommend pre-marital experimentation, particularly if there is strong evidence of love among the individuals involved. Needless to say, virginity has no place within this frame of reference. Although one might argue that many Costa Rican men continue to expect their wife to have no prior sexual experience, statements made by research participants suggest that change is afoot in this area. Jorge, for example, while indicating that he would prefer to marry someone who is a virgin, went on to say that 'we all lose our virginity at some point and if she [*i.e.* his future wife] lost it with someone else, I would still marry her, because that's why I would want to get married, because I love her.'

Lack of sexual satisfaction is one cause of divorce

Sexologists and psychologists argue that marriages can fail for many reasons, of which one is sexual incompatibility: couples may not like the same things, their respective sex drives may differ, and so on. In these cases, if communication and/or therapy does not resolve the underlying problems, divorce may be a necessary and advisable course of action. As one might imagine, this perspective stands in direct opposition to the tenets of religious discourse, which considers divorce to be an affront to God's will.

VI

Assimilation of Religious Discourses

Background

Although Christ had relatively little to say about sex during his own lifetime, he made it quite clear that he was opposed to divorce, not least because of his concern for women abandoned in this way. Moreover, in an oft cited passage from *Mark*, he is reported to have offered praise for 'male eunuchs who made themselves so to serve the Kingdom of Heaven' (Matthew 19:12). While some early Christians took this statement to mean that God requires abstinence from His followers, others who were more literal in their interpretation went so far as to castrate themselves. While Origen, who died ca254 AD, was perhaps the most notable example of this latter stream of thought, by the fourth century the Church hierarchy had prohibited all acts of genital self-mutilation (Bullough 1976).

If definitive statements by Christ on the subject of sexuality were most notable by their absence, Paul more than made up for this silence by engaging in detailed interpretations of Christ's words. While stressing that celibacy is always the best course of action for Christians wishing to lead a spiritual life, he acknowledged that marriage is an acceptable (if inferior) alternative for those who are tempted by the pleasures of the flesh (Good News Bible, 1 Corinthians: 12: 7-9) .

As for his views on women, Paul was adamant that they were the principal source of sexual temptation, citing Adam and Eve's fall from grace as evidence in support of this conclusion. Moreover, it was this belief that led him to call for women's subordination at the hands of their husbands or fathers, so that their powers of seduction might not lead other men astray (1 Corinthians 7:1)

. Of course, among the sins which they might induce men to commit, few were as serious as extra-marital sex. The New Testament was exceedingly clear on this point: adultery, fornication, sodomy and masturbation were absolutely and completely forbidden.

Still, it must be acknowledged that the early Church's hostility to sex did not develop in a social vacuum. The Near East was rife with ascetic religious sects in the early centuries of the Christian era, and many of these were in direct competition with Christianity for followers, thereby forcing the latter to adopt many of its rivals' ideas in a bid to make itself more marketable.

Two sects that were particularly influential in this regard were Gnosticism and Manichaeism. Although the former was denounced by Clement of Alexandria in the second century, its abhorrence of the material world in general, and temptations of the flesh in particular, had already proved influential among leading Christian scholars of the time, of which Justin Martyr is only the most notable example. Moreover, these ascetic tendencies were reinforced in turn by the co-option of Manichaeist doctrine by St Augustine among others. In short, Manichaeism posited a universe divided into Kingdoms of Light and Darkness, with human beings poised between the two, their bodies the product of Darkness, yet in possession of souls that were derived from the Kingdom of Light. Thus, each individual must endeavour to free his or her soul from its bodily shackles by abstaining from sex, eating a diet free of meat and so on. While acknowledging that Augustine was once a follower of Manes himself, his inability to control his own bodily desires had led him to reject Manichaeism in favour of Christianity, though he held onto his dim view of all things related to human sexuality, with the single exception being sex for the sake of procreation. Needless to say, his ideas have since proven to be extremely influential in the development of Church doctrine on matters touching upon sex and reproduction (Bullough 1976).

The Costa Rican context

During the early phase of Spanish colonial expansion into the Americas, shortage of labour power combined with the relative weakness of social control mechanisms contributed to something of a relaxation in Christian sexual norms, particularly in regions (eg. Costa Rica) that were far removed from the power centres of the time.

Thus, even as the Roman Catholic hierarchy in colonial San José condemned divorce and fornication, it was pragmatic enough to recognize its own powerlessness to enforce these edicts, along with the agricultural sector's desperate need for labourers. In the face of these

contradictions, the Church became increasingly concerned with form rather than substance, while turning a blind eye to the burgeoning population of 'illegitimate' children.

A similar outlook characterized the Catholic Church's views on the conversion of indigenous peoples. According to Ricardo Blanco, a priest who has carried out an extensive examination of the Costa Rican Church's historical development, evangelization of the native population was never a priority for the Spanish colonialists. Quite simply, the latter believed that real conversion to Christianity was not feasible due to the poor intellectual capacities of indigenous people, together with the great differences which were thought to exist between Christianity and native religions (Blanco 1987).

As for Church leaders' attitude towards the Spanish settlers, their two principal concerns revolved around ensuring that the population remained at least nominally Catholic on the one hand (*ie.* that they partook of the principal sacraments), and the advancement of their own political agenda on the other. As one might imagine, the latter point is an important one, underlining as it does the fact that the Church was closely allied to the Costa Rican state structure from its very inception.

As it happens, this cosy arrangement would remain largely unquestioned until the 1960s, when liberation theology began to make inroads among segments of the Costa Rican priesthood. Moreover, at the very moment that rank-and-file members of the clergy became increasingly vocal in their criticism of conservative Church leaders, the latter were faced with a threat from an entirely new direction: Protestant missionaries from North America eager to gain converts among the country's low and middle classes. Needless to say, their efforts in this regard have been hugely successful, leading to a 300 percent increase in Evangelical Church membership over the course of the past three decades. Today, as much as 15 percent of the country's population self-identifies as Protestant (Blanco 1987, p.34).

Drawing inspiration from Scripture, fundamentalist churches in Costa Rica have sought to re-energize Christianity by championing the (supposed) values and mores of the early Church. In matters of sex and sexuality, this entails an emphasis upon abstinence before marriage, and condemnation of family planning, abortion, and all sexual practices that are not heterosexual in orientation. Moreover, it should be noted as well that these churches have joined the Roman Catholic hierarchy in staunchly opposing sex education in the public school system, while promoting their own, religiously-based educational programmes instead.

Evidence of contradiction within dominant religious discourses serves to promote change in the way that youth think and act. State policy, gender and class relations, along with the effects of epidemics such as AIDS are among the forces that might be influential in this regard, to the degree that they induce young people to re-interpret or challenge 'orthodox' principles and demands. In the paragraphs that follow, we examine the role of gender in shaping discourse, paying particular attention to the different ways in which men and women assimilate and modify the dictates of religion.

Female religious discourses

By now it should be obvious that discourses are never able to impose themselves with absolute authority. Thus, despite the fact that ethnographic observation has shown women to be more likely than men to participate in religious activities, it does not necessarily follow that they are faithful adherents to Church doctrine. As will be made clear in the discussion below, some precepts are accepted, while others are not.

How so? In short, our interviews with female participants underscored the degree to which women's religious orientation is shaped through the interplay of Church doctrine on the one hand, and their own interpersonal relations on the other. In effect, this means that their willingness to believe in the divine origin of religious edicts (eg. prohibition of divorce) does not prevent them from discarding them should these edicts endanger the stability of their personal lives. In cases such as these, the offending precept is relegated to the status of exception, while those injunctions which have no bearing on close friends or family members are more readily accepted.

Moreover, with regard to sexuality in particular, the young women interviewed do not believe that it is simply a means of procreation (the Church's position), but see it instead as a way of expressing affection within a caring, loving relationship. This is confirmed by the comments of participants like Hilda, who indicated that sex is a 'way of uniting with another person.' Needless to say, it is but a short step from this perspective to the view that loving sex, even

outside of marriage, is not a sin. As Adriana put it, 'if some day I really love somebody and want to have intercourse with him, so what, I will!.'

Significantly, even in cases where female participants *do* support the Catholic Church's prohibition of extra-marital sex, this generally has less to do with religious conviction, and rather more with individuals' concern over what might occur should they engage in such activity. Thus, to cite but one example, Paula has decided to remain celibate before marriage 'because of the consequences of being a single mother.'

The issue of divorce draws out an analogous set of responses among the young women who participated in the study. If relations between husband and wife are sufficiently destructive, and if the children are being negatively affected, most would be willing to consider divorce as a way out of an impossible situation. Thus, while Susana and Leidy indicated that it was justified in cases of adultery, violence and mistreatment, Marianela stated quite simply that, 'if the couple's unhappy, they should do it.' Hilda is equally pragmatic, stating that 'if there's no way to sort things out, then what else is there to do?'

Prostitution receives similar treatment at the hands of the women interviewed. Paula argued that it should not be seen as sin when 'the mother does it to save her children.' Yahaira agrees, drawing a distinction between cases where it is driven by necessity as opposed to pleasure.

Not surprisingly, female participants become even less accepting of Church doctrine when it impacts directly upon their independence and personal autonomy. Thus, despite the fact that women are routinely exhorted by priests, pastors and religious texts to act submissively towards the men in their lives, most of the women interviewed rejected these demands out of hand. In Hilda's words, the expectation that a woman should bow down to her man is simply 'not realistic.' In a similar vein, Paula feels that 'there's a lot of hypocrisy in the Church and that you should be able to make your own decisions.'

As for the issue of homosexuality, many were quite negative in their assessment of it, though not, it should be added, on account of Church views on the matter. Some said that they were turned off because it was 'disgusting' and 'dirty', while others thought that it went against the natural scheme of things. For instance, Paula indicated that she does not understand how

people can alter the function of sexual organs which are meant to be complimentary. In another example, Maria stated that she was opposed to homosexuality because it deprives women of potential mates: 'there are gay men who are so good-looking and that's just a waste.'

However, it is important to note that women's perspective changes once they become personally acquainted with an individual who is gay or lesbian. Gisella, for one, defends homosexuality because she has a cousin who is gay, and is good friends with his partner as well. As she put it, 'no one has the right to meddle in his life.' a similar point of view was expressed by Yahaira, who said that she knows several gay men, and 'they're all good guys.'

Finally, it should be emphasized that young women are also willing to oppose Church doctrine when it places their health or well-being at risk. In short, most of the female participants said that they were entirely willing to use contraceptives and condoms, both to avoid unwanted pregnancies and to minimize the risk of acquiring an STD. Even Susana, who describes herself as fundamentalist on religious matters, indicated that she has no qualms about using prophylactics to ensure that she has no more children than she is able to support.

Male religious discourses

As was underscored during the course of the interview and focus group sessions, young men tend to be less devout and less preoccupied with interpersonal relations than their female counterparts. Moreover, it was also made clear to us that their understanding of what is morally right and wrong is grounded less in the omnipotence of God, and more in their own sense of order and logic. In this way, young men are most likely to obey religious interdictions that make sense to them on an intellectual level, while those that do not are transgressed with impunity or else simply ignored.

Masturbation is a case in point. Most male participants stated that they had no idea why it was deemed sinful, seeing it as a normal part of their sexual development. As one interviewee put it, 'even priests masturbate to diminish their desire for women.' Significantly, even in the limited number of cases where individuals did express opposition to masturbation, they did so in non-

religious terms. For example, Jorge argued that it was a pointless exercise: 'you are not giving love to anybody, it's just imaginary.'

In analogous fashion, young men's willingness to accept the Church's interdiction against homosexuality is to a large extent based upon their view that this is a 'logical' position to take. Arguing that men and women's sexual anatomy is 'complementary', most felt that any attempt to engage in alternative forms of sexual practice (such as anal intercourse) must necessarily be a violation of God's will. In Juan's words, gays and lesbians 'should come to terms with the way God made them, the sex God made them.' Interestingly, discovering that a friend of his was gay did nothing to alter Juan's perspective; he simply broke off his friendship with him. Needless to say, this stands in sharp contrast to women in a similar situation, who are generally far more accepting of homosexuality among friends and family members.

As for the question of non-procreative or extra-marital sex, the majority of young men interviewed were far less willing than the Roman Catholic Church to condemn such practices out of hand. Quite simply, most felt that since sex is pleasurable and 'natural' it is only right that men should be able to enjoy it, regardless of whether they are married or not. To cite José, 'if you run into a chick somewhere, why should you abstain? No way!' However, by the same token it must be acknowledged that several participants felt it made sense to remain celibate prior to marriage. Reasons cited in this regard ranged from the importance of testing one's loyalty to one's partner, to individuals' inability to support children born out of wedlock.

Even so, almost all of the young men who participated in the study disagreed with the Roman Catholic position on divorce and family planning, though once again their views tended to be grounded in logic rather than religious conviction. With regard to the latter issue in particular, most shared Guillermo's opinion that 'the Church has become too strict and puritanical,' arguing that, in cases where 'partners don't love each other' or 'can't get along,' divorce is acceptable and cannot be considered a sin. In Danny's words, 'it's better for them to stop living together and fooling themselves, otherwise marriage becomes a farce.'

Similarly, there was widespread consensus among participants that condom use and family planning are reasonable measures in the face of present-day realities, which include the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and lacking sufficient resources to care for a large number of children. Indeed, several went so far as to repeat an advertising slogan used by Profamilia, a private

company that markets contraceptives in Costa Rica: 'have only the number of children you can afford to make happy.'

Finally, with respect to prostitution, it should be noted that the majority of young men interviewed indicated that they were opposed to it. Among the reasons cited were the sense that it was preposterous to pay for sex, and the belief that most prostitutes could engage in other forms of work if they so wished. To quote Aaron, 'sex is about love rather than money; there are other jobs that don't take away from a woman's dignity.' However, like their female counterparts, the men were sensitive enough to realize that there are situations in which prostitution becomes unavoidable, for example to meet basic living expenses or support children. As Alan put it, 'if a woman's doing it to buy food, it's not a sin.'

Community religious discourses

In previous chapters we have argued that social class plays a significant role in influencing processes of discourse internalization and development. This claim is borne out when we turn our attention to religious discourses in Villa del Mar and Villa del Sol. While the middle-class population of the latter community tends to see religion as dynamic and adaptable in the face of new circumstances, for the relatively poor inhabitants of Villa del Mar not only is the Church more important in their day-to-day lives, but religious belief is much less flexible. That is to say, it is expected that religion will confront and challenge new realities, rather than adapting to them.

Thus, one is not particularly surprised to learn that religion has lost much of its importance for Villa del Sol's young people. Interview participants felt that it was no longer necessary; that it was akin to idol-worship or, in once case, that it should be rejected because it was imposed by Spanish colonizers. As one might imagine, the relative sophistication of the arguments put forth in this regard are closely related to the participants' privileged socio-economic status. Most have stayed in school far longer than their counterparts in Villa del Mar, and as such have been exposed to information about other religions or alternative perspectives on the Spanish conquest and the imposition of Christianity in the Americas.

Moreover, despite the fact that most households in Villa del Sol are characterized by two parents living under the same roof with their children (in other words, the ideal 'Christian' family), the young people from this community who participated in the study were generally quite sceptical of the Church's expectations in the area of on pre-marital sex and contraceptive use.

With regard to the former issue in particular, several participants said that it was 'impossible' to remain celibate prior to marriage. Of course, it hardly needs to be emphasized that Villa del Sol youth tend to get married much later in life than is the case in Villa del Mar, as most of them go on to some form of post-secondary education following the completion of high school. It is for this reason that long-term celibacy, as demanded by the Church, is not considered feasible. Kenneth, for one, argues that although abstention is a worthy aim in principle, 'it doesn't happen that way in real life, since most people have had sex by the time they're 17.' Along similar lines, both Gisella and Adriana felt that it was up to each person to decide whether or not to have sex before marriage. As Adriana put it, 'it's my choice, not the Church's.'

Moreover, several young people commented that they had forsaken Christianity precisely because of the emphasis placed upon chastity and virginity. For example, Hilda said that she resents the Catholic Church for its opposition to premarital sex and wishes that it was 'more understanding.' Gianina, meanwhile, criticized the Church for its refusal to countenance sex education in schools, and longs for the day when Mass will more 'fun' and sex judged less harshly. Others' attacks were more general in scope, with Paula commenting upon priests' negative attitude towards young people, and José exclaiming that he is sickened by all the 'lies' he is told in church.

In Villa del Mar, by contrast, young people look upon Christianity in far more favourable terms. Although the reasons for this are undoubtedly complex, one factor is undoubtedly the preponderance of single-parent families. In a community where stable marriages are the exception rather than the rule, children and adolescents have every reason to become staunch defenders of the Church's position on divorce and the sanctity of marriage.

Even as one acknowledges that there are some young people in Villa del Mar who have rejected the values and dictates of Christianity, most are fervent supporters of them. For instance, Juan said that 'church is an interesting and good place to go,' a statement reiterated by Ursula: 'I'm the one who gets up at seven in the morning to do the housework in order to go

to Mass. 'I've always liked it, I like everything they say.' Interestingly, even Guillermo, who is not a devout Christian, stated that religion is 'very important,' and provides a means of escaping from the troubles he faces in his everyday life.

This last point is an important one, highlighting as it does the fact that many in Villa del Mar turn to Christianity because they expect it to be able to solve their problems, whether these be family break-up or the threat posed by poverty, drugs or alcohol. Moreover, this expectation is evident in the words of participants. Rosangela, for one, stressed the importance of abstaining from sex before marriage, and said that she often tells her recently divorced sister 'to go to church to learn what it is was that she did wrong.' Meanwhile, Juan indicated that he believes 'religion to be important because it keeps young people away from vices.' Finally, Ursula, who is single and lives with her parents, said that she respects the Church for 'making people stay together in order to save marriages.'

In similar fashion, many interview participants in Villa del Mar placed particular emphasis upon the importance of meeting the Church's requirements in the area of fornication. Indeed, for some, being able to dress in white at their wedding was one of the most appealing aspects of Christian ritual. In short, while women tended to see it as a way of guaranteeing a good marriage in the future, men considered it to be a useful gauge of their future wife's moral character.

Substance abuse and prostitution are other issues that young people living in Villa del Mar hope will be resolved through faith in God. Several participants indicated that they thought religion was capable of helping drug abusers and prostitutes to make the right choices. In the words of Isidro, 'the greatest benefit the Church has to offer is that it makes people abandon drugs.' Of course, it need hardly be added that religion has actually to be successful in dealing with these problems if it is to keep young people's respect. However, there is evidence to suggest that this success is not always forthcoming, with several participants expressing disappointment at the reluctance of many priests and ministers to speak frankly about issues that concern them, such as sex and substance abuse.

Fundamentalist religious discourses

In the preceding pages, we have endeavoured to highlight some of the ways in which sexual discourses can be transformed by socio-economic status, changing gender ideology and technological innovation. However, even as one acknowledges the degree to which these developments have undermined traditional views of sex and sexuality in Costa Rica, it is clear that not everyone has embraced these new values with open arms.

Religious fundamentalists in particular have taken it upon themselves to defend Christian mores in the face of what they perceive to be an increasingly self-absorbed and permissive social order. However, this is not to say that their only concern is the past. Rather, they seek to confront modernity and restructure it to its very core. Finding a ready source of recruits among that segment of the population that has benefited least from the country's economic development, fundamentalists have challenged head-on the 'immorality' of fornication in general and the practices of sexual minorities in particular.

Still, this is not to suggest that there is only one stream of fundamentalist thought. Most notably, there are significant differences between Protestant and Roman Catholic varieties. *Inter alia*, Protestants reject the authority of the Pope, priestly celibacy, the divinity of the Virgin Mary, and the presence of images in church. Whether or not these difference are important in and of themselves - after all, only one of the young people interviewed was able to distinguish between Protestant and Catholic religious doctrine - it is clear that the Protestant churches in particular are closely allied with (and funded by) the American religious right, and as such have adopted many of the latter's views on such subjects as feminism, homosexuality, scientific progress and family planning. Indeed, one might even go so far as to argue that evangelical Protestants in Costa Rica are *more* doctrinaire and inflexible with respect to sexual matters than their Roman Catholic counterparts.

How so? As one might imagine, fundamentalists place great stress upon the extent to which modern society has abandoned traditional Christian morality. In the words of a study participant who is also the leader of a Christian youth movement, 'these days ... promiscuity is a terrible problem, especially because we live in a world that encourages it. Homosexuality is widespread in today's society.' Moreover, it is obvious that most of the young Protestants whom we interviewed have internalized a highly essentialist understanding of 'appropriate' sexual roles and relations. For example, consider the following statements by Alexandra:

I believe the natural order of things was established by God. That's why you shouldn't start trying to change things.

By imposing His law, God's aim was to eliminate the filth and impurities within us.

Temptation can only be avoided by carefully following established norms.

God made Man and Woman so that they would complement each other in marriage.

If it's part of God's plan that Man and Woman be together, there shouldn't anything different.

In similar fashion, fundamentalists are clearly distrustful of sexual pleasure in all of its forms. To cite Jonathan,

I believe sex is bad; people go berserk doing filthy things. That's why I find sex disgusting and prefer only to give kisses...Young people surrender to pleasure too easily. Sexual urges are very strong in young people; that's where all vice comes from. Sin is everywhere, it's like a current that flows and drags everything down with it, it's very strong and difficult to stop.

Of course, closely related to the opinions expressed above is the zeal with which evangelical Christians denounce the principle of gender equality. As one might imagine, their disdain for the latter was made abundantly clear during the course of the focus group sessions, where it blended into manifestations of blatant misogyny and homophobia::

Women are characterized by softness and men by strength. That's the way it should be and it shouldn't be changed. What we need to do is develop the qualities that are innate within each sex.

As far as femininity and masculinity are concerned, women are more delicate, they don't go around lifting weights or heavy bags. Men are stronger. That's a basic biological distinction.

The wife should be submissive. In a Christian marriage it's the man that's boss.

When women go around dressed in really tight-fitting mini-skirts or T-shirts, I find it offensive. It irritates me.

I believe that in societies where women are more liberated there are more homosexuals, because men have a harder time relating to women in these places.

As one might imagine, this last statement is an especially telling one, since the speaker is attempting to draw a link between female assertiveness on the one hand, and male homosexuality on the other. However, while it is clear that fundamentalists see both as 'deviant', to the extent that they challenge traditional Christian morality, there can be little doubt that their condemnation of homosexuality is particularly severe, as is amply shown by the comments below:

By destroying their body, these young homosexuals have also destroyed their soul

My experience with homosexuals leads me to believe they're negative people. They're defensive, secretive fault-finders, they debase themselves; they pretend to be happy but they only sow discord.

It's difficult to be with them, they always try to disguise themselves because they feel bad and it's because they're flawed.

AIDS, from this perspective, is considered to be a divine punishment imposed upon (and spread by) homosexuals because of their sinful behaviour:

AIDS is...a warning. There is a divine plan, a certain order; if men don't comply with it, they're going to be punished.

We knew the AIDS problem was coming; it's written in the Bible, the thing is people don't know it, they ignore it. In a world like ours, so full of evil, destruction, men kill each other, there are vices, homosexuality. That's why AIDS came.

The other day there was a special program on television where homosexuals were shown on the street kissing and hugging each other, touching each other's buttocks. Many of them have AIDS and live together because they're not afraid of anything, not even death or God.

Moreover, given their views on the origin of the AIDS epidemic, it is not surprising that many of the young fundamentalists who participated in the study were also opposed to the ethos of scientific enquiry, particularly when the latter calls into question Biblical assertions:

We have nothing, Jesus has converted us. It's a mystery, it has no rational explanation. Psychologists can't do anything, they can't even reach the spirit. You can be intellectually and academically accomplished, but if you can't reach the unconscious, that is the Spirit, your profession is useless.

I think what's really important is God's word ... science can only help.

God alone can cure the Spirit, I have friends who study psychology and they can reach a certain point, but when they can't do any more, they tell them to go read the Bible.

Of course, messages such as these are appealing to those whose socio-economic marginalization prevents them from overcoming the problems that they, along with their communities, are facing. It is for this reason that the Pentecostal Church has won over as many followers as it has in Villa del Mar. Quite simply, its uncompromising and activist stance on issues such as drugs, prostitution, adultery and other 'deviant' behaviours is precisely what its adherents expect from their church.

As well, many find the grass-roots leadership style of evangelical Christianity appealing, especially when contrasted with the extremely hierarchical and elitist management structure of the Catholic Church. In this way, not only are individuals who have little opportunity to take charge in their day-to-day lives given a chance to become religious leaders in their own right, but many are also attracted by the genuinely spontaneous and participatory nature of church services themselves.

Along similar lines, it should be noted that, despite strongly patriarchal tendencies within most fundamentalist churches, they do tend to offer women greater scope to play a leadership role than is the case with Roman Catholicism. This, combined with their attacks upon male infidelity and those who shirk their responsibilities as husbands and fathers, helps to explain why Protestant fundamentalism is so popular among female residents of Villa del Mar.

Turning to the question of how successful evangelical Christianity has been in promoting pre-marital celibacy among young people, there can be little doubt that most members of such churches do indeed plan to abstain from sex until their wedding day. However, the same might be said of religiously devout Roman Catholics, and, as our in-depth interviews made clear, not all fundamentalist youth are successful in avoiding the temptations of sexual activity prior to marriage.

Leidy is typical in this regard. 19 years of age and a longstanding member of an Adventist congregation, her sex education - both at home and at church - has been limited to vague warnings concerning the 'dangers' of sex and the importance of 'saving' oneself for one's future husband. Moreover, the adults in her life have sought to ensure that she does save herself by carefully monitoring her activities. As she put it, 'I was never allowed to go to dances, wear make-up, or go out with boys.'

Not surprisingly, given this information vacuum, Leidy learnt about sex elsewhere, from girlfriends at school and from boys on the street. 'They were very clever,' Leidy admitted, and before long she (and many of her friends as well) had a 'secret' boy-friend of whom her mother and church were completely ignorant. However, knowing nothing about contraceptives and safe sex, not only was she soon pregnant, but, once she had revealed her condition to her boy-friend, she was single as well, as he quickly left her in order to avoid having to support the child once it was born. Although she is the first to admit that she had made a mistake, she feels that this is in large part due to the fact that she 'had no one to talk to about sex.' Needless to say, this has made her somewhat resentful towards her church: 'I don't believe women have to remain virgin until marriage, many young people do it all the time, it's not something you can avoid.'

VII

Assimilation of Gender Discourses

Background

Patriarchy is so firmly entrenched in the West that most people take it for granted. However, this does not alter the fact that it is a gender-based system of domination, whose existence directly benefits men at the same time that it exploits and demeans women.

Moreover, in the relatively underdeveloped countries of Latin America, patriarchal social relations are more in evidence than is the case in Europe or North America, where women have been more successful in countering gender discrimination in their daily lives. Costa Rican women, for example, continue to be treated like second class citizens, the victims of a culture of 'machismo' which denigrates the 'feminine' while celebrating all things 'masculine.'

Needless to say, instillation of macho values and norms into children begins at an early age, and consists in the first instance of socializing them into acceptance of the view that men and women are mirror reflections of one another: the one is strong, the other weak; the one is aggressive, the other passive, the one is rational, the other emotional; the one is a bread-winner, the other a home-maker. Of course, once these tenets have been accepted as fact, it is but a short step to the 'self-evident' view men complement women (and vice versa), and thus that heterosexual union is *the* natural state of being for humankind.

However, if it is natural for men and women to be united in matrimony, it follows (according to the peculiar logic of patriarchal ideology) that all forms of emotional and sexual expression that cannot be readily subsumed under this model are, by definition, 'unnatural'. In this way, homosexuality, voyeurism, masturbation and any number of other non-procreative sexual practices are conscribed to a netherworld whose existence is tolerated only so long as it remains hidden from view.

Of course, it need hardly be added that, despite the enthusiasm with which many Costa Rican men embrace machismo, the patriarchal system did not originate in this country. Rather, its roots lie far in the past, obscured by the mists of history and subject to continuing debate among scholars in a wide range of disciplinary fields. While it would require a book in itself to do justice to the complex arguments put forth by these writers, one might nonetheless refer to Engels' (1970) *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. Although it was published more than a century ago, its line of reasoning is plausible, and has provided the basis for much subsequent writing on this topic.

In short, Engels argues that pre-historic societies were characterized by systems of governance that were at once matriarchal and communist and, despite the existence of a sexual division of labour, women's status was in no way inferior to that of their male counterparts. However, all this changed as agriculture replaced gathering-and-hunting as the principal means of subsistence, with men taking it upon themselves to keep any surplus generated, and, ultimately, to pass it along to their descendants. Moreover, as the locus of sexual power shifted, matriarchal governance structures fell increasingly into disuse, to be replaced by ones grounded in patrilineal succession and patriarchal control.

Needless to say, Engels' thesis has been greatly developed by feminist scholars in the 1970s and 1980s, who took it upon themselves to engage in further analysis and interpretation of the origins of female subordination and exploitation in Western societies.

Many of these writers posited a biological basis for patriarchy. Jane Schefer (1970), for example, sought to explain the domination of women by men in terms of the latter's capacity to experience multiple orgasms. Within this frame of reference, women were subordinated in order to circumscribe and control their procreative potential. A similar position was advanced by Susan Brownmiller (1976), who argued that women's oppression derives from their relative physical weakness. In this view, patriarchy's roots can be traced to the moment Man first realized that he could use his sexual organ to rape Woman.

Others, meanwhile, placed their emphasis somewhat differently, downplaying the importance of biology while highlighting instead the role of a changing political economy. In a particularly notable example, Gerda Lerner makes the case in *The Creation of Patriarchy* that it was

women's subordination at the hands of men that provided the basis for the latter's subsequent domination of nature and other human societies. Interestingly, this position is analogous to that adopted by Firestone when she argues that the workings of the economy are grounded ultimately in sexual relations, rather than relations of production.

Finally, it should be noted that some feminist scholars have gone so far as to reject the notion that there is any biological basis for patriarchy at all. The work of Monique Wittig (1971) is typical of this school of thought. Quite simply, not only does she contend that all sex roles and relations are socially constructed, but that even supposedly immutable physical processes (such as childbirth and hormone production) are responsive to changing cultural contexts. In this way, if one is to explain the patriarchal system, one must ground one's analysis in political rather than anatomical explanations.

What is one to make of the discussion above? Certainly, it underscores the difficulty in arriving at any clear-cut explanation of patriarchy's origins. However, be this as it may, there can be little doubt that it remains a potent force in Costa Rica and elsewhere, subjugating and oppressing women while at the same time dictating the bounds of the 'normal' in all matters pertaining to sex roles and relations.

How are sex roles internalized?

From a very early age, boys and girls are taught how to act, think and speak in ways that are 'appropriate' to their gender. Their teachers are many, ranging from parents, siblings and peers, to television, popular music and magazines. Moreover, not only are these messages ubiquitous and multi-variate, but they are constantly reinforced through the threat of ridicule, humiliation and physical violence should an individual fail to abide by them.

As one might imagine, the internalization process is both conscious and unconscious, starting at home and continuing throughout the life-course. Yadira Calvo (in Berrón 1995), a distinguished Costa Rican feminist, recalls learning her subordinate role as a child, in the small details of daily life: in the amount of food served to men and women (the latter are served less), or in processes of household decision-making (all the important decisions are made by men). Moreover, Calvo's experiences are validated by the findings of academic studies of the impact of gender upon

adults' perception of babies and young children. That is to say, there is a strong tendency to see girls as passive and boys as aggressive, regardless of the actual behaviour of the children in question (Kaschak 1995).

Other key sites involved in the process of gender internalization include school and church. In the case of the former, this is seen in the way that teachers devote more attention to the boys under their care than the girls. At the same time, girls tend to be interrupted more often when they are speaking, and are given fewer chances to comment or ask questions. As for church, women's subordination is rendered self-evident by the fact that they are banned from entering the priesthood, along with frequent exhortations from the pulpit that they fulfill their God-given role as wives and mothers.

Taken together, these messages serve not only to ensure that individuals comply with the dominant gender order, but they are implicated as well in the creation of a psychology of gender, whereby men and women position themselves according to a particular set of engendered identities. Needless to say, once they are internalized in this way, they become very difficult to change.

Public awareness of gender and the impulse for change

Patriarchal gender relations have been a fixture of Costa Rican society since the earliest days of Spanish rule, and have long provoked resistance on the part of the country's women. While some denounced incidents of rape and incest committed against them, and publicly demanded compensation (Jimenez 1994), others' resistance was more private in orientation, embodying self-empowerment or a refusal to become complicit in the reproduction of the existing gender order.

However, despite the undoubted importance of these women's actions, knowledge about them has been lost or suppressed as a result of mainstream scholars' obsession with *history*, in which marginal or discordant voices are cast aside as irrelevant. Thus, at the moment that feminist writers purposively set out to re-claim the past through the lens of *herstory*, the question of

whether or not women ever resisted patriarchy was replaced by that of when did this resistance become a matter of public concern.

In Costa Rica, one might argue that the first public manifestation of women's power took place in 1923, as the country's nascent Feminist League embarked upon a campaign to secure women's right to vote. Despite the League's eventual success - female enfranchisement became a reality following the 1948 civil war - it was never able to broaden its base of support beyond a relatively small community of urban-based intellectuals. Thus, it was not until the 1970s, with the wide-scale incorporation of women into the waged labour-force and the re-birth of a national feminist movement energized by the gains made by women in North America and Europe, that feminist ideas began to take root among a broader cross-section of Costa Rica's female population (Berrón 1995).

In short, not only was it at this time that reference began to be made to the country's 'gender problem', but there was also growing recognition of the fact that gender identities, far from being immutable and static, are negotiable and subject to change. Needless to say, this marked a significant departure from the past, and as such its origins warrant further discussion.

Few developments were more important in this regard than the government's decision in the 1970s to make contraceptives widely available to Costa Rica's female population. Quite simply, there was a growing concern that large families of ten or more children were no longer appropriate in a country that was attempting to abandon its agricultural past in favour of an industrialized, urbanized future. Thus, in an attempt to reduce family size, clinics and hospitals across the country opened their doors to thousands of women, offering them a range of birth control options, including most notably the Pill.

Whether or not this intervention had its desired effect, there can be little doubt that it had a significant impact upon the women themselves. Not only were they brought together in clinic waiting rooms where they could discuss issues and problems they faced in common, empowering themselves in the process, but their newfound control over the number of babies they bore gave them a degree of autonomy in their relationships with men that would have been unimaginable to their mothers and grandmothers.

Without wishing to exaggerate the impact of contraceptive availability upon the patriarchal system itself, one might nonetheless argue that it served to call into question certain fundamental assumptions regarding women's 'proper' role in life. Was it merely to produce children and provide sexual and personal services to a working husband? Increasingly, there were those who argued that it was not, with university-based feminists taking the lead in attacking the sexist stereotyping that was endemic in almost all areas of Costa Rican society.

Moreover, at the same time that these activists were engaged in campaigns against beauty contests, female poverty and male violence, ordinary women across the country were beginning to make changes in their own lives, whether going out to find work in the waged workforce, or demanding that their men do more to help them with domestic chores. However, despite their success in undermining some of the assumptions and generalizations that had served them so ill in the past, these were rapidly replaced by new ones that were no less harmful to the cause of sexual equality.

For example, discourses that portrayed women as nothing more than baby-making machines gave way to ones which emphasized the complexities of motherhood, and women's key responsibility for the psychological and moral development of their children. Along similar lines, the view that a wife is nothing more than her husband's servant was abandoned in favour of one which cast women in the role of passionate lover and understanding companion, with all of the duties and burdens that this position requires.

Still, regardless of these latter developments, it is clear that men have been put on the defensive by women's growing assertiveness and independence. While this has led to some concessions on their part - seen for example in their willingness to take on certain household responsibilities - they have also become more demanding of their spouses in the area of emotional support, and ready to blame them for their children's problems. Moreover, it should be noted as well that most Costa Rican women have refrained from pressing for radical change in dominant sex roles and relations. Thus, even though there is widespread agreement that patriarchy remains a force to be reckoned with, few would go so far as to advocate the dismantling of the institutions of marriage and motherhood in their entirety. In this way, one might argue that the country's feminists are firmly grounded in the liberal camp, and that there is little support for a radical feminist programme of revolutionary change in the way that women and men relate to one another.

Male discourses

The dominant gender order among young Costa Ricans has undergone significant changes over the course of recent years. Thus, although young men are aware of the unambiguously patriarchal nature of their parents and grandparents' relationships, they have sought to follow a somewhat different path.

Drawing upon findings from the in-depth interviews, male adolescents' assimilation of gender principles has produced an orientation that might best be described as one of 'enlightened despotism'. That is to say, despite arguing that men possess attributes which women lack, and thus that male superiority can be taken for granted, respondents also sought to emphasize the importance of using power responsibly. In this sense, their view is reminiscent of the reform-minded citizens of Ancient Greece who advocated the use of 'temperance' in men's dealings with women, thereby marking a departure from the highly dictatorial relationship that had been the norm in the past (Foucault 1988).

Although the reasons for this evolution in young men's attitudes are clearly multi-dimensional, one might nonetheless point to two factors which appear to be especially important in this regard. On the one hand, women's struggle for equality, combined with increased rates of participation in the waged workforce, have clearly had an impact on men's assimilation of feminist principles. On the other, men's heightened sensitivity to the dangers posed by HIV/AIDS and other STDs have prompted many to look askance at machismo's emphasis upon proving one's virility through sex with multiple partners.

However, this is not to say that Costa Rican men have internalized a discourse of full equality between the sexes. Instead, as has been made clear above, the dominant discourse has merely shifted its emphasis, with certain restrictions being lifted (eg. on women holding certain jobs) while new demands are imposed. Foremost among the latter is the expectation that wives, besides caring for their husband's children, will also act as his therapist, being 'understanding' and 'supportive' while helping him resolve his emotional crises. Moreover, this role has been extended to encompass offspring as well. No longer is it deemed acceptable for mothers to attend merely to their children's *physical* needs; safeguarding the latter's psychological

development is now seen as being equally important, with responsibility for any lapses in a child's behaviour placed squarely on the shoulders of his or her mother.

Despite the assumption that women can fulfill all that is expected of them while receiving little or no emotional support in return, most of the young men who participated in the study believed women to be the naturally weaker sex, both physically and psychologically. This is seen in Juan's comment that women should not go out alone 'because they might be assaulted', or in Jonathan's recollection of being beaten as a child, and being told that he 'should take the pain like a man.'

Not surprisingly, this tendency to associate weakness with women has led male participants to reject any behaviour that might be considered 'feminine'. For example, Carlos indicated that cooking was unmanly because 'it's a woman's job.' Meanwhile, Jonathan reported being told by his mother that men are meant to 'go out and earn a living,' and thus should not be required to perform domestic tasks. As for Maikol, he distinguishes men and women on the basis of whether or not it is appropriate for them to cry. Finally, Jorge and Donaldo differentiate the sexes according to personal habits and appearance, with the latter arguing that only women should have long hair, while the former stated that he found it odd when men devoted time to 'womanly things', such as dressing fashionably or grooming themselves.

Still, it is clear that young men's definition of what constitutes 'womanly things' is undergoing something of a transformation. In particular, there appears to be growing acceptance, at least among some of the interview participants, of male involvement in activities related to the social reproduction of the household, such as cooking and cleaning. Thus, despite the fact that his father does not help with domestic chores, Kenneth indicated that he regularly sweeps and washes the floor. Along similar lines, Guillermo stated that doing housework does not 'bother' or 'embarrass' him.

Interestingly, sports and the workplace are two additional areas where there is evidence of a more progressive attitude on the part of some of the male participants. Mainor, for one, suggested that women should be able to "study and work in whatever field they like. These days there are women bus drivers and women mechanics.' Others agreed, with Guillermo and Aaron stating that even construction work should not be off-limits to those women who wished to pursue it. Moreover, the issue of sporting activities elicited a similar response. In short, respondents felt it was unfair to prevent women from participating in certain sports solely on the

basis of their sex, with the only exception being boxing, because (according to Aaron) 'there's this idea about women being too feminine for this sort of thing.'

As one might imagine, this latter point is an important one, underlining as it does the fact that there are still some forms of behaviour that the young men interviewed will not tolerate among their female friends and lovers.

Foul language is the first such area that is considered taboo, and all the more so if the words in question are related to sex or sexual organs. For example, as David made clear, a 'decent' woman would never dare say such things as 'let's fuck' or 'let me suck your dick.' Most other participants agreed, with Santiago going so far as to say that he broke up with his girl-friend because 'she let dirty words slip out.'

Sexually forward or aggressive women were similarly reviled by male research participants. On the one hand, this is seen in the dim view taken of women who ask men out, with Aaron in particular arguing that women should never take the initiative and should always be more 'conservative'. On the other, there was widespread hostility towards women who had extra-marital affairs or multiple partners. Although some tempered their criticism by acknowledging that they expected women to adhere to a higher standard of behaviour, there was a clear consensus among the participants that such behaviour could not be tolerated. Thus, Danny argued that women who initiate sex risk being raped, while David referred to such individuals as 'holes' and 'pigs'. Finally, Donaldo stated that women should resist the urge to engage in intercourse because they might get pregnant and have to support the child.

However, so long as women observe these interdictions, it was generally felt that men should exercise their power magnanimously, and treat members of the 'weaker' sex with respect and consideration. Luis, for example, stressed that women should not be treated like 'objects' or 'slaves', and that it was men's duty to 'protect' their female friends and relatives from potential aggressors. In similar fashion, Mainor suggested that men should choose their words carefully and not be 'coarse' when in female company, a point echoed by Carlos, who emphasized the importance of always being respectful, courteous and affectionate towards women.

Although there was general consensus among male participants that they must act responsibly towards the women in their lives, most went on to say that they were generally happy with dominant sex roles and relations. Thus, even though Frederico was cognizant of men's 'authoritarian' tendencies, he indicated that he was 'quite satisfied' with his upbringing and the way in which he related to women. As for Aaron, despite claiming that he was not a partisan of machismo himself, felt that it would be unwise to attempt to alter existing sex roles, since this would be viewed 'unfavourably' by many segments of society. Conversely, both Guillermo and Jorge, even as they argued that much of men and women's behaviour is ingrained and thus difficult to change, said that they wished men could give freer rein to their emotions.

Of course, whether or not young men have any interest in moving away from macho forms of sexual expression, in many cases they are being forced to do so by the prospect of contracting HIV/AIDS. In short, for the majority of interview participants - even those who were 18 or 19 years of age - the dangers posed by this disease were such that they abstained from sex altogether, even if this meant being unable to boast about one's virility to one's friends. Thus, while Aaron explained his virginity by noting that 'abstinence helps to avoid risks,' Jorge went so far as to claim that he never even masturbates, so great is his fear of HIV infection and God's wrath.

Female gender discourses

Not surprisingly, when one turns one's attention to women's understanding of these issues, a somewhat different picture emerges. Although female participants were in broad agreement with their male counterparts on the biological roots of gender, and in particular the notion that men and women's roles in life are opposite yet complementary, in no way did they believe that this justified women's subordination.

Thus, even as they acknowledged men's superior strength, courage and stamina, the young women interviewed went on to argue in favour of a gender order based on specialization rather than domination, in which men and women devote themselves to different tasks and responsibilities and, in so doing, enhance the quality of each other's lives.

What does gender 'specialization' entail? As one might imagine, it is firmly grounded within the dominant paradigm, with several participants arguing that hormonal differences between the sexes, together with women's central role in biological reproduction, dictate what the latter should and should not do. As Susana put it, 'women are more maternal ... they have to stay in the house because they're the ones who get pregnant and have to care for the children. That's natural and cannot be changed.' Other female participants agreed, with Adriana arguing that 'since women conceive, they're made for housework,' while Diana suggested that fondness for children is 'in women's genes, it's totally natural.'

However, if the young women who participated in the study were united in stressing the key importance of maternal 'instinct' in women's lives, there was far less agreement on the latter's implications. Thus, while some adopted an extreme position and stated that women should devote themselves exclusively to domestic activities, others were more open-minded, arguing that there should be little or no restrictions on women's career choices, with the possible exception of policing and construction work. Needless to say, those who were more conservative in their outlook tended to be equally uncomfortable with women's involvement in sports. Wendoly was particularly adamant in this regard, stressing that soccer, baseball and basketball were all activities that should be off-limits to women.

Still, despite the traditionalism of some of the research participants, all felt that men should play an active part in child care and daily household chores. Hilda, for one, believes that husbands owe it to their wives to take responsibility for half of this work: 'I think that if a woman can do the household chores, so can a man.' In similar fashion, both Adriana and Tatiana emphasized that housework should be shared equally among men and women, with Adriana going so far as to argue that men should help cook as well.

Moreover, an egalitarian outlook was also in evidence when discussing questions of mobility. That is to say, female participants strongly disagreed with the view, espoused by many of their male counterparts, that restrictions should be placed upon women's freedom of movement. Thus, Tatiana said that she gets irritated when her mother asks her father for permission to leave their home, when she knows full well that her father needs no such permission himself. In a similar vein, Hilda expressed dismay at her mother's submissiveness, and the fact that she is 'stuck inside the house when [her father] goes out whenever he likes.' Finally, Maria indicated that she does not understand why she has less freedom than the male members of her family. As she put it, 'they do whatever they please and if they want they don't even have to come home to sleep, yet I have to ask permission for everything.'

Of course, closely related to the issue of mobility rights is that of female objectification. As one might imagine, there was widespread repulsion towards men who partake of pornography, sexual violence or other activities which debase women. Wendoly, for example, indicated that she feels disgust whenever a 'man makes insinuations by gripping his crotch.' In parallel fashion, Daisy has little respect for her male class-mates who continuously boast about their sexual exploits, and is sickened by the way in which they treat the sex act as though it were 'like drinking a glass of water.'

Needless to say, sexual violence aroused a similar degree of repulsion, with several participants indicating that they would never tolerate it in the context of a relationship. Wendoly went furthest in this regard, having related the story of how she had been raped her father's friend, a violation that had left her with feelings of great 'resentment' and a 'thorn in the heart.'

However, in spite of the views expressed above, it is clear that the young women interviewed do support key aspects of the patriarchal gender system, if only for fear of what would take its place. In the words of Dunia, 'I don't know what would happen if there were no differences between men and women and we were all alike; I'd worry that we would no longer have any rapport with each other.'

Thus, the majority of female participants had little wish to change the way in which men and women interacted on a day-to-day basis. Wendoly, for one, felt it was very important that men be masculine and women feminine: 'it's horrible to see a woman who's aggressive and not submissive' or, for that matter, a man who dresses up 'like a woman.' Daisy shares this view, arguing that 'there should be differences' between the sexes, and that it behoves women to 'show off their femininity and dress in tight clothing.' Others agreed, all the while stressing the unsightliness of men who choose to dress in an 'unmasculine' fashion. In Susana's estimation the latter are usually 'faggots', just as women who pay little attention to their personal appearance are probably 'dykes'.

Sex and courtship initiation are two additional areas where female participants were happy with the existing distribution of roles and responsibilities. With regard to the latter issue in particular, there was general consensus that women should always wait for the man to take the initiative. Otherwise, as Daisy put it, they would be considered 'very fresh' at best, and prostitutes at worst,

since 'only hookers ask men out.' Along similar lines, the majority of young women also felt that men should be the ones to play a leading role in the sex act itself, since they were thought to be more knowledgeable in these matters than their female counterparts. Tatiana, for example, felt it was important for men to 'help' their wives on the night of their wedding, as 'the woman is usually very nervous.' Leidy agreed with this perspective, arguing that men will inevitably have more experience 'because nobody could care less whether he's a virgin or not on his wedding night.'

Given the discussion above, is one to conclude that young women are generally happy with the manner in which the men in their lives interact with them? While there is clearly some appreciation for men's forwardness in the realm of relationships, the bulk of participants went on to say that they wished their men were more communicative and expressive. Hilda, for one, said that although she is attracted to strong, masculine men, she would 'like them to be more affectionate and giving.' Likewise, several participants commented upon the tendency among men to treat their girl-friends like inanimate objects, with scant regard for the latter's feelings. Thus, as Leidy made clear, there is a need for men to counter this state of affairs by 'surrendering' to their emotions and being more giving in the context of their relationships .

Indeed, in many respects Leidy's perspective is typical of female participants' view of gender relations *in general*. That is to say, even as they show themselves willing to accept certain premises set forth within the existing gender system, for example in the areas of dress and interpersonal relations, they would like to mitigate or erase those aspects which they find most harmful, such as sexual violence and objectification. Obviously, this is a liberal position rather than a radical one, yet it is seen by the young women who took part in the study as the strategy that is most likely to produce results without running the risk of shattering their families and relationships.

Gender discourses in the communities

Considerable effort has already been devoted to the task of comparing and contrasting the cultural contexts within which young people live out their lives in the two communities under study. However, one issue that has *not* been discussed thus far is that of the relationship between *cacheros* and *playos*, two figures who are well-known to Villa del Mar youth, yet have no equivalent in Villa del Sol.

Who are they? Quite simply, a *cachero* is a masculine, seemingly-heterosexual man who engages in active anal intercourse with other men, usually *playos*. These latter individuals are, as Alberto put it, men who 'dress like women and wish they were one.' David is typical in this regard: into passive anal sex, he enjoys dressing in drag and would eventually like to become a transvestite.

What is important to bear in mind, however, is that Villa del Mar residents do not consider *cacheros* to be homosexual. Even David, whose partners include both married and single men, stressed this point: 'the guys I sleep with are real men.' Other young people agree, with Kenneth describing a recent trip to the beach where he and his friends came across two men having sex. However, rather than referring to the parties involved as gay, Kenneth characterized them instead as a 'man fucking a *playo*.'

As one might imagine, there is no such distinction in Villa del Sol, where *playos* are simply men who sleep with other men; whether one is the active or the passive partner is considered immaterial. Of course, such a view is grounded in a rational-scientific understanding of sexual orientation, in which homosexuality is nothing other than a deviation from the heterosexual norm. As we will seek to emphasize in the pages that follow, this translates into significantly different gender discourses in the two communities. While in Villa del Sol emphasis is placed upon gender 'psychology' when attempting to make sense of men and women's relationships, in Villa del Mar attention is focused instead upon the 'activity' or 'passivity' of particular individuals.

The Villa del Mar model

Economic stagnation and chronic unemployment are defining characteristics of Villa del Mar. In this environment, men are faced with the prospect of joblessness for much of the year, while women are forced to find waged work themselves order to make ends meet, either in the service sector, or in local *maquiladoras* and tuna-processing plants.

Needless to say, economic marginalization has had far-reaching effects upon the community's social fibre, as attested to by high levels of family violence, divorce and single-parenthood among its population. Indeed, so poor are the prospects of many of the town's male inhabitants and so great is their level of alienation and anger that women will often prefer to leave their partners (either for another man or to live by themselves with their children) rather than stay in an abusive relationship.

However, despite the degree of economic independence which many women in Villa del Mar enjoy, this has not translated into heightened respect for the rights of women in general. Rather, one might argue that the reverse is true, given that the community is characterized by a more 'traditional' gender order than Villa del Sol, where feminism has made considerable headway, particularly among the community's younger members.

What then is one to make of gender relations in the town? In short, Villa del Mar's residents subscribe to an ideology centred upon the body and its physical activities. Within this model, women and men are defined according to their relative aggressivity or passivity, with roles and activities appropriate to each. In women's case, they are required to act as care-givers and nurturers, providing a range of personal services to their children and husbands. In men's case, they are expected to be the family's bread-winner and leader, and to protect it from external threats and dangers. Moreover, underpinning this division of labour are well-defined rules and conventions outlining the bounds of 'appropriate' behaviour. Thus, women do not need to be told that they should act, dress and talk in a 'feminine' fashion, just as men do not have to be reminded of the importance of always behaving in a suitably 'masculine' manner.

It is precisely in this context that the *cachero* derives his significance. That is to say, Villa del Mar encompasses a world view in which sexuality, rather than being defined through the elaboration of a series of psychological attributes (as is the case in Villa del Sol), is grounded instead in the dichotomization of dominator and dominated. Within this frame of reference, all those who are aggressive and dominate others are necessarily men, while those who are passive and dominated are by definition women.

Given this perspective, the object of desire, be it man or woman, becomes less important than the identity of the subject: *playos*, because of their femininity, are understood to be women in men's bodies, just as 'butch' lesbians are thought to be men in women's bodies. Meanwhile,

those who behave in a manner 'appropriate' to their gender - such as *cacheros* and feminine lesbians - are labelled heterosexual, regardless of whom their lovers happen to be.

Of course, it is no coincidence that this model is the predominant one in Villa del Mar. Since it is a community in crisis, whose menfolk feel emasculated and threatened by virtue of the fact that they cannot provide for their families, the latter compensate for their own sense of powerlessness by dominating others on a physical level. That is to say, men are encouraged to prove themselves by using violence to subjugate those around them, most notably their wives and children. Inordinately high levels of physical aggression were apparent throughout the research process, with young people relating any number of stories of beatings, sexual and physical abuse, rape and incest.

To illustrate the degree to which violence have become part of young men's everyday lives, it is useful to consider the following statement by Kenneth, who was endeavouring to explain when one can legitimately force oneself upon a woman: 'sometimes the eyes tell you, they say no, but their eyes and their body language say yes. In cases like that, it's okay to use force.'

Gender discourses in Villa del Sol

Not only is Villa del Sol a more affluent community than Villa del Mar, but it embodies a gender order that is itself conditioned by economic mobility, high levels of educational attainment, and a male population whose ready access to employment opportunities facilitates the fulfilment of bread-winning obligations to their families.

While these characteristics have undoubtedly played a role in discouraging divorce and separation in the town, they have also contributed to the elaboration of an understanding of 'appropriate' gender roles and relations which stands in sharp contrast to that which is predominant in Villa del Mar.

How so? Quite simply, whereas gender discourses in the latter community focus on physical strength and the active-passive dichotomy, in Villa del Sol emphasis is placed instead upon the interplay of opposing (yet complementary) 'psychologies'. From this perspective, women are women not so much because of their supposed 'passivity', but rather on account of their distinctly 'feminine' mentality and thought processes. Moreover, it is precisely because of men and women's different mentalities that the latter are thought best-suited for care-giving and nurturing tasks, and the former for activities that are competitive, arduous or intellectually challenging.

The complementarity of this gender system should be obvious. It assumes that the mental development of men and women, whether by virtue of education, hormones or peer expectations, produces incomplete minds that need each other if they are to become whole. However, despite its tendency to damn as 'deviant' those who do not fall neatly into one or the other categories, it is nonetheless a model that is flexible in the face of changing realities. The reason is simple: male and female roles are interrelated. Thus, to the extent that being male in Villa del Sol means simply *not* being female, women can take on new roles or re-define existing ones without necessarily undermining the premises upon which the gender model is based.

Indeed, gains have been made in this area. No longer are household chores the sole purview of wives and daughters, as men are showing themselves increasingly willing (even if reluctantly) to assist in meal preparation and child care. Similarly, women can now pursue their studies or become career-minded professionals without risking the wrath of their partners. Still, this is not to say that gender discourses have ceased to be oppressive. For example, even though it is no longer unthinkable for young women in Villa del Sol to engage in pre-marital sex, they are still forced to contend with a pernicious double-standard. As Hilda put it,

If a man goes around with a lot of chicks it doesn't matter, but a woman must make herself be respected. However, society is opening up and a woman who takes the initiative is no longer considered a slut. Still, men have to "fuck" a lot of chicks in order to be considered manly.

Moreover, women are also aware that they are the ones who will pay the price should they be unlucky enough to become pregnant within the context of a pre-marital relationship. At best, their family will forgive their 'mistake' and continue to lend support; at worst, they will be abandoned by their boyfriend and left to fend for themselves. Indeed, there are some who

might argue that, at the same time that middle-class women are gaining access to new rights and new possibilities, their partners are placing new burdens upon them (*eg.* in the area of emotional support), undermining the gains made in the process. Thus, for a woman like Maria, true gender equality remains a faraway and elusive goal: 'What I am saying is that women suffer more than men, it's always the woman who gives more love, and then we are ridiculed for it. It would have been better to have been born a man and not suffer so much.'

VIII

Assimilation of Scientific Discourses

Background

Given the complexity inherent within the sexual discourses of Science, arising as they do from any number of disciplinary contexts, it would scarcely be feasible for us to attempt to make sense of all of them in this chapter. Rather, we will focus instead upon that which is most relevant to the work at hand, namely the discourses that fall under the rubric of 'reproductive health'⁴.

As one might imagine, the latter is heavily influenced by the biomedical model, in which 'problems', be they an over-abundance of teenage pregnancies or the spread of STDs, can be corrected through the application of the appropriate 'cure'. Prescribed by physicians, nurses or social workers, these cures generally take the form of education and prevention campaigns, in which 'scientific' information is mobilized in the fight against diseases (or, in the case of pregnancy, 'irresponsible' behaviour) and the conditions which facilitate their propagation.

However, before we set out to explore the impact of reproductive health discourses upon Costa Rica's young people, we must first provide some background information. As was made clear in Chapter 2 above, the country's indigenous population is estimated to have been between 20,000 and 30,000 at the time of first contact with the Spanish colonizers. Needless to say, disease brought from Europe would soon take its toll, and by 1611 this figure is believed to have

⁴ Hundreds of articles were read on the subject of reproductive health. Most of them have been published in the **Revista de Ciencias Medicas** (Medical Science Review) San Jose, Costa Rica: Imprenta Nacional.

dropped to 15,000, and it would take close to a century before it returned to its pre-contact level (Thiel 1977). In more recent times of course this rate of growth has accelerated considerably, with the population climbing from 300,000 to 800,000 in the 50 years between 1900 and 1950, and to well over 3 million in the early 1990s (CELADE 1990).

However one wishes to account for this surge in Costa Rica's population, especially in the post-World War II era, there can be little doubt that state-led industrialization and 'modernization' were key contributing factors. In short, this was a period when vaccination campaigns, combined with improved living conditions and access to primary medical care conspired to slash the country's mortality rate in a dramatic fashion, from a rate of 25 per 1,000 in the 1940s, to less than ten per 1,000 in the 1960s (AD,C 1987).

While much of the ensuing growth was initially absorbed by the countryside, it was not long before the latter's carrying-capacity was reached, prompting ever-larger numbers of people to relocate from their rural homes to urban areas. To the extent that the nascent industrial sector was unable to provide jobs for the new arrivals, over-population became a growing concern for state officials, whose response included the creation of a National Programme for Family Planning and Sex Education in 1968 (since renamed the Reproductive Health Programme).

Needless to say, it was at this moment that family planning moved from the private realm to that of the public, and became a legitimate object for state intervention. With support provided by a number of agencies, including the Ministry of Health, the Costa Rican Social Security Fund and various non-governmental organizations, the Programme gave women access to a range of contraceptive options, as well as providing them with information on the benefits of birth spacing and means of avoiding unwanted pregnancies. Without wishing to downplay the degree of opposition to the Programme's objectives, it was clearly successful in promoting widespread contraceptive use, as is attested to by the fact that Costa Rican women are now more likely to be users of contraceptives than their counterparts anywhere else in Latin America (CCSS 1994).

However, if state actors achieved their declared aim of reining in an unsustainably high birth rate, their interventions also served to achieve another, perhaps less welcome, end, namely that of exposing Costa Rican society to a plethora of new discourses related to sex, sexuality and

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reproductive health. In short, not only were technical advances in these areas widely discussed in the mainstream media, but the country became immersed in a series of debates over the morality of such practices as contraceptive use, abortion and sterilization. As one might imagine, religious groups took the lead in denouncing any hint of liberalization in these areas, and there can be little doubt that their opposition explains, at least in part, the continuing illegality of abortion and sterilization in all cases except those where the patient's own health is at risk.

Moreover, once matters of sex and sexuality had entered the public sphere, the terms of debate soon broadened to encompass other contentious issues as well, adolescent sexual practices most notable among them. Quite simply, this was the time when experts 'discovered' the dangers inherent in young people's sexual impulses, with the case of teenage pregnancy cited as a key example. That is to say, not was there deemed to be a physical risk to mother and child, but their emotional and psychological well-being was thought to be in a high degree of danger as well.

Of course, this is part of a larger movement, reflective of broad socio-economic changes taking place in the country as a whole, away from the notion of 'youth' and towards that of 'adolescence'. How so? In short, while there had previously been little differentiation between adulthood and youthfulness - after all, this was the time when most people got married, had children (in the case of women) or became apprenticed to a trade (in the case of men) - adolescence was increasingly portrayed as the stage in one's life when one *prepared* oneself for the burdens of adulthood. Thus, it was understood above all to be a waiting period, meant to instill in young people a greater preoccupation with their future as wage-earners, consumers and parents. Needless to say, 'waiting' in this context also referred to sexual initiation, with the country's opinion-leaders adopting the position that, if individuals were not yet ready to set out on a career and life of their own, how could they be trusted to engage in 'responsible' sex?

Still, despite the proliferation of messages regarding the importance of a (relatively) care-free adolescence to individuals' personal development, it is clear that not all young people are able to enjoy this stage in their life to an equal degree. Poorer families, with fewer resources, simply do not have the luxury of keeping children at home who do not contribute substantively to the

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social reproduction of the household, just as they cannot afford to send them to university or provide them with the means of embarking upon a profitable career trajectory.

Be this as it may, there can be little doubt that all Costa Rican youth were touched, to a greater or lesser degree, by this new understanding of adolescent sexuality. Beginning in the 1960s, state actors, in association with non-governmental organizations, launched a series of health programmes in the country's secondary schools, at the same time that dominant discourses became increasingly strident in their condemnation of youthful sexual activity. Moreover, as part of this process, parents were expected to control and monitor their children's activities, all the while implanting in them the capacity to exercise self-control over their impulses and urges.

While one might argue that school-based sex education was meant to provide further reinforcement to these latter messages, the Ministry of Education's efforts in this regard were effectively undermined by vocal criticism on the part of Church authorities, who were strongly opposed to any move which weakened their grip on the moral instruction of the young. As one might imagine, the ensuing debate was both raucous and emotive, as well as progressively broad-based. Should family planning methods be discussed with boys, girls or both sexes? What about sexual intercourse? Abortion? Homosexuality? Masturbation? What forms of contraceptives are legitimate? Should birth spacing be recommended or not?

Obviously, there are no simple answers to these questions, yet even as religious discourse structured and circumscribed the terms of debate, other, competing discourses were entering the fray. One of these was of course Science, which proposed its own, wholly secular perspective on sex and sexuality. Another was the street, which offered young people the chance to learn about sex in an environment that was far removed from the disapproving gaze of authority figures.

However, in the 1980s a new ingredient was introduced into the debate: HIV/AIDS. In short, not only did its spread to Costa Rica arouse widespread fear and consternation among the population at large, but it also forced state actors, among others, to come to terms with the fact that many adolescents were sexually active, and hence at risk of contracting the virus. Moreover, its arrival also had another significant effect, namely that of mobilizing the gay community against homophobic claims that the disease amounted to divine punishment for

perverse behaviour, in the process making it very difficult to deny the existence of homosexuality in the country, or to pretend that Costa Rica was a model for all its neighbours in the field of human rights.

This latter point is especially significant when considered alongside the fact that the government's initial response to HIV/AIDS in 1985 included measures that actively discriminated against sexual minorities, as though infection were the product of identity rather than practice (Madrigal and Schifter 1990). However, under pressure from donor countries and international organizations, state agencies were cajoled into removing overtly homophobic elements from their AIDS programmes. While this is not to suggest that these programmes ceased to be guided by a conservative ideology - amply attested to by the emphasis placed upon abstinence and monogamy as the prevention strategies of choice - the government began to recognize the value in a harm reduction approach. Motivated by fears of an epidemic of disastrous proportions, state agencies began to distribute information on the proper use of condoms, along with other ways that individuals at high risk of infection might protect themselves.

Indeed, it is precisely in this context that HIV/AIDS created the conditions necessary for frank discussion of a host of sex-related subjects that had previously been out of bounds as far as polite society and the mainstream media were concerned. Thus, in spite of the alarmist tone adopted by some, there can be little doubt that the public in general was exposed to positions and perspectives (for example, in the area of sexual orientation) that, ten years previously, would never have been allowed to see the light of day. In similar fashion, once state managers had decided to take an active role in AIDS prevention and education, it became increasingly difficult for them to sanction the dissemination of certain messages (eg. always practice safe sex) while arbitrarily silencing others (eg. women have the same right to sexual fulfilment as men).

However, given the extent to which the Church remains a potent political force in Costa Rica, the government has been loathe to risk alienating it altogether. Instead, one might argue that the two have reached an unofficial understanding, whereby 'illegitimate' practices are tolerated so long as they are not publicized. Female sterilization is a case in point. Denounced by the Church hierarchy as sinful and unacceptable, it is the contraceptive of choice for Costa Rican couples (Madrigal 1994), and is widely available to women in hospitals throughout the country.

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Scientific discourses and young people

Regardless of the state's motives in promoting a 'scientific' understanding of sex and sexuality, it is clear that young people have assimilated the latter in the same way that they internalize any other discourse: accept that which is expedient and reject the rest. Indeed, there is little reason to believe that the young people who took part in this study are even aware of the basic tenets of scientific thought. If they were, one presumes that they would be willing to modify their perspective in the face of countervailing evidence. As it stands, however, their support for scientific postulates is limited to those instances where these validate already-held positions and beliefs.

For example, in some of the focus groups we called into question young people's view of the origins of homosexuality by informing them that there is no scientific basis to the belief that most gay or lesbian individuals are born into dysfunctional families. While Villa del Mar youth, who generally subscribe to an essentialist understanding of homosexuality in any case, were entirely willing to accept the veracity of this claim, those from Villa del Sol rejected it out of hand, since it was inconsistent with their belief that being gay is the result of environmental factors.

Needless to say, this in turn supports the view that young people's assimilation of scientific discourses is fractured along lines of class and gender, with the latter acting in a fashion reminiscent of 'barriers' or 'filters'. How they do so, and the effects they produce are among the issues which will be addressed in detail in the paragraphs that follow.

Male discourses in Villa del Sol

As has been suggested in previous chapters, young men in Villa del Sol were among the most likely of all research participants to espouse rational-scientific discourses, and the least likely to have internalized religious ones. Of course, in this connection it is useful to recall that Villa del Sol is a relatively wealthy community, and hence its members have access to monetary, educational and psychological resources that are quite simply unavailable to their counterparts in Villa del Mar.

Needless to say, these resources, together with the social and educational mobility with which they are associated, have served Villa del Sol's young men well, giving them self-confidence in their reasoning skills and shielding them from the physical dangers that are all too prevalent on the streets in Villa del Mar. While this in turn has made them that much more likely to listen to and act upon 'scientific' advice in the area of AIDS or STD prevention, it has also prompted them to emphasize rational thought at the expense of emotions and intuition.

This perspective is evident in their view of the differences between men and women. Making liberal use of Freudian categories and explanations, male participants from Villa del Sol see the sexes as the product of contrasting processes of psychological development, which serve to create adult men and women whose minds are at once opposing yet complementary. Given this view, it does not matter that women are now engaging in activities that were once seen as exclusively male (*eg.* attending university), since their femineity is understood to rest elsewhere, for example in their way of thinking and interacting with others.

Of course, it bears emphasis that young men do not necessarily subscribe to this 'scientific' explanation of gender differences because it has been judged to be the most logical or reasonable. Rather, they do so, at least in part, because it offers them a stable world-view and justification for the status quo.

Interestingly, male participants' self-interest is also discernable in their defence of government-sponsored family planning programmes, which they justify through reference to a range of economic arguments. In short, not only did they suggest that large families amounted to a serious financial drain on household resources, but they alluded to the dangers of overly-rapid population growth as well. For example, consider the following statements made by Carlos and Alexandro, respectively:

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Before having a child, you have to plan, you have to know how much money you're going to spend, how many children you're going to have, and when you have them, what you're going to do.

You have to wait two years to have another child, you have to use contraceptive methods like condoms, the pill and all that shit. Doctors must have some reason for telling us to use them.

Moreover, young men were also supportive of safe sexual practices, invoking social and individual responsibility as reasons why one should always use a condom when having sex. As Aaron put it,

once my sister brought a brochure explaining about condoms and I think that if I hadn't read it I wouldn't know how to use it. I liked it a lot and it helped me learn how to use it. It's a way of planning and preventing health problems, diseases, and pregnancies.

Indeed, despite the fact that not all participants had actually worn a condom, the vast majority were in favour of their use, with individuals offering numerous reasons for their stance, ranging from 'the idea appeals to me' to 'I must protect myself.' Also noteworthy in this regard is the fact that many of the young men suggested that *both* partners should take responsibility for STD prevention, and that it is not simply up to the woman to convince her reluctant mate to wear a condom in spite of himself.

However, by the same token it is clear that cultural barriers to widespread condom use continue to exist in Villa del Sol. That is to say, even though they appear to be readily available in local stores and pharmacies, the majority of participants indicated that they would be too embarrassed to buy them in their community.

Turning to questions related to the spread of HIV/AIDS, our interview and focus group sessions provided ample evidence in support of the view that prevention messages disseminated through the mass media are having an impact upon Costa Rican youth. Thus, young men in Villa del Sol showed themselves to be quite knowledgeable regarding modes of transmission and means of reducing the risk of exposure. To cite Carlos,

We are told [by the mass media] to use condoms, that sportsmen are infected ... and about prevention campaigns. All these things gradually make you learn.

In short, there was widespread awareness among participants that it is a disease caused by a virus (in some cases explicit mention was made of HIV), that there is no cure and that it is almost always fatal. Moreover, most were also aware that sexual intercourse was the principal means of transmission, and that everyone, whether gay, straight or bisexual, is equally at risk.

Additionally, it is clear that the young men interviewed knew how to protect themselves. Condoms were cited in this regard, as were monogamy and abstinence. Indeed, one might argue that Alexandro's response is typical of the participants more generally:

AIDS is one of the things that leads me to abstinence, because I'm scared. I'm scared to meet a person who wants to have sex that very night because just as that person is easy with me, she could have been just as easy with anybody else who had AIDS. That's why I won't have a sexual life with someone I don't know real well, that's why I avoid the heat of the moment, I try to handle the situation, so I don't lose control.

However, in some cases male participants have taken their faith in Science's power to protect them AIDS a step too far. On the one hand, this is evident from the views expressed by certain individuals that there are pills or vaccines available to counter the spread of STDs, including AIDS. On the other, a number of young men said that they were afraid of becoming infected through kissing or contaminated cutlery, having heard that HIV resides in any and all bodily fluids.

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As for masturbation, there was broad consensus among the male participants that it is a harmless, albeit pleasurable pursuit. Thus, there was little support for the Church's position that it is sinful, with most indicating that the practice is 'normal' or 'commonplace'. Indeed, some went so far as to argue that it is a bodily need. As Carlos put it, 'masturbating is like taking a bath, it's a normal part of everyday life.'

Even among the minority who were opposed to masturbation, their reasons were grounded less in religious dogma, and more in their own sense of logic and reason. Thus, while some argued that 'one isn't giving love to anybody', others said that they do not do it because 'women were invented to have sex with.'

Moreover, young men's understanding of homosexuality was similarly cloaked in the trappings of science and reason. Drawing heavily upon psychoanalytical theories of sexual orientation, participants deemed it to be the product of an 'abnormal' childhood or adolescence. Thus, while Santiago suggested that it was the fault of parents who did not give their children the appropriate cues early in life, others, such as Ivan, argued that it stems from having only sisters. In still other cases, alternative explanations were proposed, such as the view that homosexuality could be traced to incidents of rape or sexual abuse as a young child.

Of course, the mere fact that young men in Villa del Sol understand sexual orientation to be rooted in environmental rather than genetic factors does not make them any more tolerant of homosexuality in their midst. Indeed, one might go so far as to argue their perspective has made them even more intolerant of gays and lesbians, since they are fearful that homosexuality is 'contagious' and that individuals can be 'converted' to it. Should confirmation of this claim be required, one need only consider statements by individuals like Jorge, who said that 'everyone can do as they like, homosexual, heterosexual, whatever, as long as it doesn't affect me or other people.'

Significantly, the issue of virginity elicited a similar response among male research participants. That is to say, most equated it with a state of mind or particular psychological orientation; by

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contrast, relatively little emphasis was placed upon the sex act itself. Of course, such a view of virginity has led young men in Villa del Sol to attach greater importance to it than their counterparts in Villa del Mar, where it is only seen as noteworthy in relation to women, since they are thought to be the only ones who undergo a discernable physical change in the wake of their first sexual encounter (*ie.* they lose their hymen).

Given this perspective, it is not particularly surprising that male participants in Villa del Sol were generally supportive of the view that men - as well as women - should abstain from sex prior to marriage. In Santiago's words,

because there are many venereal diseases, you have to reserve yourself for the person you love, because if you don't, later on you will feel emotionally discouraged and get very depressed.

However, be this as it may, it is clear that male participants placed greater stock on women's virginity than their own, with Aaron in particular stating that, 'if a woman has sexual intercourse she's no longer pure. She must be chaste, less experienced, have higher moral standards and values.' Meanwhile, others suggested that, even though it is preferable for men to remain celibate until their wedding night, they are often under strong pressure to have sex, if only to fulfill the 'macho' expectations of the society in which they live.

Finally, it should be noted that there was a high degree of sensitivity among participants that they are adolescents, and that this is the stage in their lives when they are prepared for the responsibilities of adulthood. To cite Aaron, 'this is when you try new things and gain the experience necessary to be an adult.' Needless to say, this perspective is typical of the vast majority of male participants who hailed from middle- and upper-class family backgrounds, who saw their teenage years as a time for study, travel and enjoyment.

Male discourses in Villa del Mar

We have already suggested that religion has a very important role to play in the day-to-day lives of Villa del Mar community members. Lacking access to educational and financial resources, individuals invoke the power of God as a means of saving them from problems such as poverty and illness. Moreover, greater significance is also attached to one's physical strength, since it is the latter that allows one to defend one's interests or get one of the few available jobs in the construction or fishing sectors.

However, this is not to imply that scientific discourses are absent from Villa del Mar, as young people here are no less exposed to messages disseminated by the mass media as their counterparts in Villa del Sol. Still, they are more likely to accept and internalize those discourses which accord most closely with their own realities and interests. As one might imagine, it is precisely for this reason that Villa del Mar's young men draw so heavily upon essentialism in accounting for existing gender roles and relations. In short, they believe that men's superiority is grounded in their physical strength and aggressiveness, just as women's domination can be justified through reference to the latter's weakness and submissiveness. Moreover, as was made clear at the beginning of this chapter, a similar understanding pervades these individuals' reading of sexual orientation. Quite simply, homosexuality is thought to be grounded in one's genes, and manifests itself through an unnatural femininity in the case of gay men, and an unaccountable masculinity in the case of lesbians.

Moreover, one might argue that the emphasis placed by young men upon the body and physical processes is equally discernable in other aspects of their thinking on sex and sexuality. For example, among those who supported birth control measures, most argued that their importance lay in the fact that they ensured that no family member went hungry. Of course, others rejected family planning methods out of hand, chiefly on religious grounds. As Isidro put it, 'the family exists to have children, as many children as possible.'

Meanwhile, the use of condoms appears to be broadly supported by male participants in Villa del Mar, in theory if not in practice. That is to say, despite widespread awareness among the

latter that condoms help prevent unwanted pregnancies and reduce the risk of STD infection, many went on to admit that they often do not use one. Although several reasons were cited for this failure to do so, by far the most common explanation was that it reduced sensitivity, thereby taking away from the pleasure associated with the sex act. Needless to say, this perspective lends further credence to our argument that Villa del Mar youth see sex primarily as a physical experience rather than a psychological one.

Still, this is not to suggest that reduced pleasure is the only reason why young males often refrain from wearing a condom. On the one hand, many felt that it was up to their female partners to ensure that one was used, since women are the ones who run the risk of becoming pregnant. On the other, several individuals indicated that they found it difficult to gain access to condoms, since there are no large supermarkets in the town, and many smaller stores simply do not stock them.

As for AIDS, although male participants clearly have a basic understanding of its dangers, this awareness is undermined by the fact that many have fallen prey to myths and misinformation concerning the disease. Moreover, one might argue that participants had little sense that they were personally at risk of contracting the virus, a finding that stands in sharp contrast to Villa del Sol, where several individuals indicated that their fear of AIDS had made them decide to abstain from sex altogether. Needless to say, the relatively carefree attitude prevalent in Villa del Mar can be explained by the presence of far more immediate concerns in the minds of young people there, among them poverty, crime and drugs. In the words of several young men whom we interviewed, 'everybody has to die of something.'

Moreover, participants' understanding of the causes of the disease was generally quite weak. In short, not only was there little awareness of the link between AIDS and HIV, but few appeared to realize that the disease almost always ends in death. Participants' knowledge of the key modes of transmission was stronger, though even here misconceptions existed, with several individuals suggesting that one could become infected through the exchange of saliva.

Meanwhile, in terms of prevention, condom use was the only method cited. No one could think of alternative strategies that might be used to reduce the risk of infection, including abstinence and masturbation. However, in spite of this, participants did show themselves to be sensitive to the fact that AIDS is a disease that can strike anyone, regardless of sexual orientation. As Mainor put it,

I think that at this time, everybody's at risk, because before it was thought that this was mostly a homosexual and lesbian disease, but I think that we should all be better informed so as not to suffer what other people are suffering.

Turning to the question of masturbation, it is obvious that this is a far more contentious issue in Villa del Mar than it is in Villa del Sol. While several participants did express support for the practice, for reasons similar to those identified by their middle-class counterparts (*ie.* it is a biological 'need'), many were strongly opposed, having assimilated religious views on the matter. Yet, even in these cases, it should be noted that the decision not to masturbate is made less on the basis that it is a sinful or wicked pastime, and more because of fears of subsequent punishment. Thus, whereas Louis and Lenin believe that the practice brings about physical or mental illness, Mainor suggested that others can tell when he has been masturbating:

People talk ... friends and adults see you on the street and tell you, 'you've been jerking off, haven't you? You better stop because you know it's bad for you.' Maybe they're just kidding, but I think they're right in a way.

Along similar lines, it is clear that young men have assimilated the Church's position on pre-marital celibacy as well, particularly for women. However, as with other issues, stress is laid upon the physical dimensions of virginity, with the presence or absence of a hymen being the key determinant of one's status. Of course, many go on to argue that, since men have no hymen to lose, virginity is simply not an issue for them, a perspective espoused by Lenin in our interview with him: 'a man can do anything he wants, but a woman, she's the one you'd like to get a virgin.'

Finally, with regard to participants' understanding of adolescence, the vast majority adopted a strict chronological definition, suggesting that it was the period in one's life that fell roughly between the years of 12 and 18. In other words, unlike Villa del Sol, there was little emphasis upon such pursuits as 'study' and 'enjoyment'. Rather, attention was focuses more or less exclusively upon changes taking place in one's body, with several young men citing puberty, growth of body hair and a deepening of one's voice as key indicators of adolescence.

Female discourses in Villa del Sol

From our interviews with young men in Villa del Sol, it was evident that they perceived scientific and religious discourses to be diametrically opposed to one another. Although this perspective was also evident among the young women who participated in the study, it was less pronounced, and there was a general unwillingness to accept 'scientific' principles that call into question the sanctity of marriage or heterosexual relationships more generally.

Thus, it is not especially surprising that female participants were familiar with key family planning methods, and all were in favour of their use. Reasons for their support ranged from the need to look after one's body to fears regarding the economic costs of a large family. Moreover, it should be noted as well that the young women had little difficulty in reconciling their position on family planning with adherence to the Christian faith. As Tatiana put it, 'the Church is not going to support me or my children.' In any case, most were clearly of the opinion that economic considerations outweighed all others, as the following statements make clear:

You can't have children just like that. There are poor people who have 5 or 10 kids and they don't have the means to support them. Then they should have only one or two, or only as many as they can afford. [Ileana]

I think I do support family planning because it's no good to have a lot of kids all in a row and anyway a woman's body gets tired. You have to see people's economic status to see how many children they can afford to have. Family planning is pretty important for everybody. [Maria]

Meanwhile, with regard to condoms in particular, female participants were aware that they are useful both in preventing pregnancy and in reducing the risk of STD infection, and all had a clear understanding of how to use them, regardless of whether they had had their first sexual experience or not. Gianina is typical of this latter group:

well, let's say this is the penis [shows her finger]. You take the condom, you put it here [points to the upper part of her finger], you pull it down and at the end there's some space with air so that the semen stays there.

Moreover, there was also broad consensus among the young women interviewed that condom use is vital if one is to protect oneself from AIDS and other dangerous diseases:

I use condoms because I can't say I know my partner real well, you never know who you're with. He can look real healthy, but you never know. So I just protect myself. [Nadia]

It prevents venereal disease and pregnancies and I know it's not a hundred percent safe but it's safer than a lot of other gadgets around, it's the safest method there is, you don't muck up your body. [Paula]

However, despite this seemingly favourable attitude towards condom use, it is clear that many participants find them a nuisance at best, and repulsive at worse. For example, several made note of their profound embarrassment at having to walk into a store and buy them. In the words of Alexandra, 'you should have seen how embarrassing it was. We went to the cashier and he

just stared at us. I don't know, I think the man should buy them, not the woman.' Others' discomfort was even more strongly felt, with a number of participants commenting upon the degree to which they were repelled by them. To cite Sophia,

there are classmates of mine who use them of course, but there are others who buy them just to show off ... and it's disgusting. Well, at least to me condoms are disgusting, they're so soft-like. My girlfriends also think they're totally disgusting.

As one might imagine, this statement serves to underscore the fact that young women in Villa del Sol have greater difficulty in coming to terms with the use of condoms than their male counterparts, a finding that has clear implications for AIDS prevention initiatives among this segment of the population.

Still, there can be little doubt that female participants are aware of the dangers posed by HIV/AIDS, with most of the young women agreeing that it is a venereal disease, transmitted through sexual intercourse and contaminated blood, and that it has no cure. Moreover, condoms were identified as the principal means of prevention; other prevention strategies, such as abstinence, were not mentioned.

Significantly, and in sharp contrast to the young men of Villa del Sol, female participants had little faith in Science and its ability to protect individuals from HIV and AIDS. For example, several young women expressed scepticism at experts' claims that one cannot become infected through kissing, while others noted that they were fearful whenever they received an injection. However, by the same token, all of the participants agreed that everyone is at risk, regardless of age or sexual orientation. Drawing once again upon the words of Sofia,

everybody's at risk, because, you see, a baby can be born like that, or you could have a transfusion with contaminated blood, or teenagers through sexual intercourse, adults too, or a little boy can be raped. So everybody's at risk.

As for the question of masturbation, the young women who took part in the study were divided as to whether it was a sinful pastime or not. Among those who were opposed to it, most felt either that it made no sense, or that it was an affront to God. Supporters, by contrast, suggested that it was a natural, normal activity, with Adriana in particular arguing that 'it's part of growing up, when teenagers start to experiment with their bodies.'

Turning to homosexuality, female participants were generally in strong agreement with their male counterparts that its causes are environmental rather than genetic. Thus, while some blamed it on the lack of a male role model in the home, others, such as Priscilla, suggested that it was the product of 'too much pampering or ill-treatment.' However, this is not to suggest that all of the young women felt this way, with two exceptions being Gisella and Maria, who argued that gay men and lesbians are 'born that way, it's in the genes, it's hormonal.'

However, regardless of their position on the roots of homosexuality, there was relatively little concern among female participants that they might become 'tainted' through contact with a gay or lesbian individual. Needless to say, this view sets them apart from the young men of Villa del Sol, among whom fears of 'infection' are widespread.

Virginity is another issue that sets Villa del Sol's young women and men apart. In short, while many suggested that the ideal relationship was one in which both partners remained celibate until marriage, it was widely felt that it should be up to each individual woman to decide what course of action is best for her. In the words of two participants,

I think that's how virginity is: a woman who is virgin is pure and a woman who is not is just as good, just as special, just as intelligent. If she's not virgin it doesn't matter, it's one more experience. [Paula]

A woman who wants to remain virgin is virgin, and a woman who doesn't is not, it's a personal decision. [Gisella]

As one might imagine, the preceding responses underscore the degree to which feminist values and principles have been internalized by young women living in Villa del Sol. That is to say, not only do they believe that there should be equality among the sexes, but they are particularly resentful of the hypocrisy and double-standards inherent within macho culture. Should confirmation of this view be required, one need only consider the following statements by female research participants:

I just don't understand, why should a woman be expected to remain chaste until marriage but not a man? [Sophia]

They can go around having sexual relations with girls and all, so why don't girls also have the right to have sex? If later they marry a woman who's not a virgin, that shouldn't matter. [Paula]

It's not fair, because just as a man has the right to have sex with a woman, a woman should have the right to have sex with a man. This doesn't mean the woman is a prostitute or something. [Gisella]

Finally, with respect to female participants' understanding of the concept of adolescence, one might argue that there are both similarities and differences in comparison with the views expressed by their male counterparts. On the one hand, there is general agreement that it is, in essence, a transitional period between one's carefree existence as a child and the burdens of adulthood. As Gisella put it,

For me, adolescence is the time when a person has to stop being a child and start being an adult and exercising responsibilities, because when you're a child you practically

have no responsibilities, but when you become an adult, then you have to set goals for yourself and decide what you're going to do in life.

On the other hand, many also saw it as a stage when their freedom of action began to be circumscribed by the watchful eyes of their parents and families. Thus, several participants commented upon the fact that they were no longer allowed to go out by themselves, or forbidden from associating with boys. Of course, this in turn is related to the second area in which male and female perceptions differ. While the former tended to associate the onset of adolescence with a particular age, young women identified it instead with their first menstruation or onset of breast development.

Female discourses in Villa del Mar

Given that there are relatively few prospects for socio-economic advancement in Villa del Mar, it should come as no surprise that young women who live in this community tend to see marriage and a devout life as their best hope for the future. Of course, not only does this mean that cohabitation and motherhood come at an early age for many of the women here, but there is a marked tendency as well to discount or discard any discourse which compromises their chances of establishing a family.

Birth control is a case in point. As the interviews and group sessions made clear, Villa del Mar's young women knew relatively little about the efficacy and types of methods available to them, and few felt that lack of knowledge in this area was especially problematic. Still, it must be acknowledged that family planning does have supporters among those whom we interviewed, with several young women commenting upon their usefulness in limiting the size of one's family. In the words of Dunia, 'it's good because, without it, all of a sudden you'll realize you've got a whole lot of kids.'

As for the usefulness of condoms in particular, most female participants were aware that they help prevent pregnancy and STD infection. However, despite this level of consciousness, only a minority reported making regular use of them. Why is this the case? On the one hand, several participants indicated that it was the man's responsibility to decide whether or not one should be worn, since he is typically the more experienced of the two.

On the other, many thought condoms impracticable because of their supposed impact upon sexual pleasure. As Alexandra put it, 'having sex with a condom isn't the same thing ... it's better without one.' Needless to say, this view provides further evidence in support of our argument that young women and men in Villa del Mar attach more importance to physical processes and the body than their counterparts in Villa del Sol. Still, in one respect at least women from the two communities are similar: both groups indicated that they felt very embarrassed whenever they went into a store in search of them.

Turning to questions related to HIV and AIDS, although female participants had a basic understanding of the disease, its dangers and principal modes of transmission, their level of awareness was not as high as that of young women residing in Villa del Sol. In short, not only did their reluctance to use condoms lead them to discount the latter as a prevention strategy, but most did not see themselves as likely victims in any case. Moreover, even in those instances where participants did acknowledge a degree of risk, they generally felt that others, among them prostitutes, *playos* and men, were in much greater danger of becoming HIV positive.

Interestingly, however, female participants' tendency to associate homosexuality with AIDS does not necessarily mean that they are willing to condemn this segment of the population out of hand. That is to say, despite widespread adherence to an essentialist understanding of sexual orientation, few felt that individuals should be rejected solely on this basis. In the words of Wendy, 'I wouldn't spurn them because after all they're human beings.'

If Villa del Mar's young women are prepared to tolerate homosexuality among their friends and family, one activity that they are most definitely *not* prepared to tolerate is masturbation. In short, while some argued that masturbation is something that women simply do not do, others

attacked it in the harshest possible terms, a position that is clearly reflective of the Church's own condemnation of the practice.

Meanwhile, the Church's influence is also evident in young women's views on pre-marital sex. Quite simply, most felt strongly that one should 'save' oneself for one's future husband, arguing that a woman's virginity is one of her most valuable assets. As Daisy put it, 'ever since I was a little girl I knew I should remain virgin until marriage, because you're supposed to remain clean, free of sin.' Significantly, in spite of the fact that a minority of participants did defend their right to engage in sex outside of marriage, very little criticism was heard concerning men who failed to remain celibate. In explaining this silence, one might point either to the relative weakness of feminist ideology in Villa del Mar, along with women's willingness to tolerate sexual double-standards for the sake of their relationships with men.

Finally, with regard to young women's understanding of the significance of adolescence, most expressed an opinion similar to that of their male counterparts in Villa del Mar, and associated it with a particular chronological period in their lives, stretching from the onset of puberty to their late teen years. Although a small number of participants did make reference to the opportunities that adolescence affords for dances, trips and the like, most did not see it as a particularly special time in their lives. Indeed, some went so far as to say that their adolescent years were even less enjoyable than those which had preceded them, given that they were now faced with all manner of restrictions on their movements and activities.

IX

Learning and Imposition of Discourses

Background

It need hardly be emphasized that discourses have neither agency nor the capacity to reproduce themselves. While it is true that they are vigorously promoted by the groups that derive greatest benefit from their existence, they also depend upon the active collusion of society members in general, who reinforce and sustain them through any number of discursive practices. For example, in the case of patriarchal gender discourses, they are reproduced through practices as diverse as the tendency to elect far more men to Congress than women (equally true for Costa Rica and the United States), or parents' tacit encouragement of aggressive behaviour among their male children.

However, even if the benefits associated with a given discourse are not spread evenly across all segments of society, their expanse is usually wide enough to ensure that most people prefer to sustain the status quo rather than risk engaging in practices that might undermine it. Still, the complexity of the social fabric is such that no discourse is able to command absolute hegemony, providing individuals with an opportunity to disregard, reject or reinterpret specific elements without calling into question the entire discursive edifice.

As for questions related to sexuality in particular, young people assimilate dominant mores and values through a feedback mechanism in which a dualistic world-view produces polarized sexualities which serve in turn to promote and reinforce the internalization of dualistic sexual discourses. In this way, young people's capacity to operate within a compartmentalized sexual culture turns crucially upon their successful adoption of an internal control system that arranges, controls and censures contradictory information.

Transmission of messages

In Foucault's estimation, power is wielded rather than possessed, necessitating forms of analysis that are focused less on institutions themselves, and more on the means by which the latter are capable of producing 'docile bodies' that are amenable to discipline and control (Foucault 1977; 1978). Sexual discourses are one of the key fields of knowledge through which this is accomplished, and thus it is our purpose in this chapter to explore how they become 'anchored' in young people's minds.

Of course, in embarking upon this project, we do not wish to suggest that institutions such as the Church, state or mass media are somehow unimportant. Indeed, given the resources they command, they are anything but irrelevant in the dissemination of messages about sexuality. For example, churches play a key role in the lives of community members, especially in Villa del Mar, where they distribute food and clothing to the poorest families and organize social, cultural and educational activities for young people. In similar fashion, universities are able to shape individuals' views and outlook by virtue of their monopoly over the distribution of diplomas and degrees. For those who wish to become accredited as 'professionals' in their field, they must prove themselves willing to operate within the bounds of the dominant paradigm; otherwise they risk mediocre grades at best, and expulsion at worst.

Needless to say, this latter point is crucial, revealing as it does the multi-faceted nature of disciplinary power. While one might argue that coercive force is the ultimate sanction imposed upon those who fail to conform, other methods are no less effective. These include the threat of job loss for workers who refuse to become complicit in their supervisor's sexism, or girls' fear that they will be thrown out of their home should their parents discover that they are sexually active.

However, it should be noted that, in most cases, these threats need never be carried out, since individuals learn from an early age to accept the tenets of dominant discourses and adapt their behaviour to them. As one might imagine, the preeminent site for the imposition of such discourses is the home, where mother, father, siblings and the extended family all have a part to play in the inculcation of appropriate values and norms.

Thus, with respect to religion in particular, it is generally the mother or grandmother who teaches the child basic principles and requires him or her to attend mass, catechism classes and other church-sponsored activities. This was confirmed in the group and interview sessions, where young people such as Maria and Aaron indicated that they went to church principally on account of parental pressure. While a number of participants went on to describe their fear of being denied intimacy by family members should they fail to live up the latter's expectations, by the same token it is clear that many also used religious devotion as a means of building power alliances with particular relatives, or of attacking those who did not live up to community expectations in matters of faith. How so? To cite but one example, Isidro reported to us that he has continued to attend mass regularly in the two years since his mother left his abusive father for another man, despite the fact that she no longer goes to church regularly herself. In short, he saw this as a way of publicizing his disapproval of his mother's 'immoral' conduct.

Along somewhat similar lines, several female participants referred to the distinction made between 'good' and 'bad' girls, with the former enjoying a measure of moral superiority over the latter. Needless to say, public demonstration of one's faith plays an important role in this regard, with sexual promiscuity closely associated with an irreligious outlook. Thus, while Anna believes that her personal devotion places her in the camp of those who enjoy an unsullied reputation, she is well aware that there is another group of 'misguided and headstrong' girls in her community who have failed to develop a fear of God.

As for gender-centred discourses, the observations of project ethnographers show quite clearly that both mothers and fathers are involved in the teaching process. On the one hand, male siblings are forced to compete for their father's approval by acting in a sufficiently masculine fashion, for example by being successful in sports or having many girlfriends. On the other, mothers are also complicit in the reproduction of a patriarchal gender order, to the extent that they teach their daughters to be submissive while expecting their sons to be domineering and

aggressive. While many women engage in such practices simply because they have themselves come to accept patriarchal relations of power as 'normal', others do so in order to protect their daughters from what they perceive to be the dangers inherent in a man's world.

Learning and repetition

Although there are a number of ways in which young people internalize hegemonic discourses, including most notably *autos da fé*, dissemination of essentialist or dualist precepts, and repetition, the latter is by far the most common. For example, in the Roman Catholic Church, the same interdictions are touched upon by the priest in almost every mass, with both Hilda and Santiago commenting upon the repetitive nature of the sermons and how bored they feel each time they go to church. In similar fashion, Maria, who goes to a denominational school run by nuns, indicated that she is exposed to religious exhortations and prayers on a more or less constant basis.

As one might imagine, repetition is also important in ensuring that individuals behave in a manner that is 'appropriate' to their gender. Thus, while girls are continuously reminded of the dangers of going out alone or after dark, boys are similarly pestered if they do *not* wish to go out, since masculinity demands that they be independent, self-reliant and street-wise.

Moreover, if by some chance parents are not teaching their offspring appropriate gender behaviour, other institutions, among them the mass media, advertisers, the educational system and the Church are only too willing to make up for this deficit by offering children and adolescents constant reinforcement as to what is and is not acceptable.

***Autos da fé*, essentialist thinking and manichaeism**

Meanwhile, *autos da fé* are another important means through which young people are taught not to challenge or question the status quo. How so? In short, if individuals are to become good Christians, they must show themselves able and willing to rein in their common sense and accept the tenets of the Church on the basis of faith alone. Moreover, once they have done so in matters of religion, it becomes increasingly easy for them to suspend their critical faculties in other areas as well, such as human relationships and biology.

Of course, the question of essentialism is highly relevant in this regard, since it is yet another area in which a divine plan or mandate is invoked to explain the Church's position on any number of issues, from women's supposed weakness in the face of temptation to the requirement that priests abstain from all sexual activity. Again, once individuals have learned to accept precepts such as these without question, they are far more likely to assimilate other forms of essentialist thinking as well, for example in matters of gender role differentiation or sexual orientation. Significantly, this understanding was confirmed in our in-depth interviews with young people, with the latter proving entirely unwilling to challenge essentialist perspectives on a wide range of issues, including those cited above.

Along similar lines, the Church is also involved in fostering a manichaeist world-view among its followers. While this is not to suggest that it is alone in doing so - after all, the modern age is to a large extent founded upon dualistic thinking - its influence is particularly pervasive. At the pulpit and in the Bible, human beings are divided into any number of categories: good and evil, men and women, believers and infidels, saved and sinners. As one might imagine, this emphasis upon dichotomies serves to encourage fragmentation of the personality at an individual level, while lending credibility to the binary oppositions inherent within other hegemonic discourses.

Proselytism

Without wishing to downplay the importance of the assimilation techniques described above, this does not alter the fact that there is a near-constant need for recruitment campaigns designed to attract new followers. In both of the communities under study, project ethnographers identified several individuals who devote themselves, on a more or less full-time basis, to the task of convincing others of the verity and power of dominant discourses.

Not surprisingly, Church officials stand out as particularly prominent in this regard, with priests, parishioners and young people themselves called upon to convince others of the importance of attending mass or participating in Church-sponsored activities. However, as active as the Roman Catholic hierarchy may be in attempting to disseminate its message among the Costa Rican population, its efforts pale alongside those of fundamentalist Protestant Churches, which enjoy a well-deserved reputation for mounting aggressive proselytizing campaigns. Indeed, they have even gone so far as to democratize the recruitment process, calling upon all members of the congregation to go door-to-door in a concerted effort to win over new converts.

While a grass-roots approach is also used in the popularization of other discourses, most notably those associated with machismo and a patriarchal gender order, such tactics are a far cry from the professionalism that characterizes most state-run reproductive health campaigns. Typically, these revolve around the mobilization of physicians, nurses, social workers and volunteers in carefully-orchestrated drives to promote and disseminate approved messages on a range of health topics.

Social instruments of control: punishment

Reference has already been made to the coercive tools available to upholders of the status quo should the reinforcement techniques described above fail to prevent 'inappropriate' behaviour by young people. In the paragraphs that follow, we will touch upon some of the most common forms of punishment deployed against transgressors, including censorship, reclusion, categorization, exile, violence and abandonment.

Censorship

As one might imagine, the capacity to suppress or silence alternative perspectives is a powerful weapon in the armoury of dominant social forces, and the latter do not shrink from using it. For example, frank discussion of topics related to sex and sexuality is strongly discouraged in most homes and schools, thereby giving the Church broad scope to communicate its own perspective to young people without fear that they will be contaminated by 'illegitimate' sources of information.

Discouragement takes several forms. With respect to female sexuality in particular, our interviews with young women pointed to the existence of what might be called a conspiracy of silence, in which mothers, aunts and grandmothers (let alone male relatives) simply refused to discuss any issue related to this topic. Thus, not only did most of the participants receive absolutely no emotional support when they began to menstruate, but many felt so uncomfortable with this development that they postponed telling their mothers for as long as possible.

In this way, one might argue that families' reticence to discuss menstruation is indicative of their fear of adolescent female sexuality. How so? Quite simply, mothers (and other relatives) associate their daughters' period with the risk of pregnancy, and hence feel that any discussion of it will only increase the likelihood that they will become sexually active. Interestingly, young men face no such taboo in discussing their own sexuality. Though this is certainly not to suggest that families are more likely to provide their sons with sex education than their daughters, it is generally assumed that boys will learn all they need to know on the street, thereby obviating the need for secrecy.

Of course, it should be emphasized that sex is not the only area in which the effects of censorship manifest themselves. Priests and others in the Church hierarchy (both Catholic and Protestant) routinely deploy warnings concerning the dangers inherent in entertaining beliefs that run contrary to Christian morality or dogma. Moreover, should these threats prove insufficient, Costa Rican law includes anti-blasphemy provisions whereby individuals who

criticize the personage of Christ could find themselves facing a lengthy prison sentence. Given this state of affairs, it is not particularly surprising that research participants had for the most part come to accept religious censorship as normal, with individuals like Hilda admitting to feelings of guilt whenever she disparages the Church for its misogyny.

Significantly, censorship is also invoked in defence of Costa Rica's dominant reproductive health discourses, with physicians taking it upon themselves to ensure that interventions in this area do not pursue 'inappropriate' ends. For example, when the medical establishment first awoke to the danger posed by the AIDS epidemic, by no means did it wish to embark upon a prevention campaign that could be perceived as being tolerant of homosexuality. Thus, when a local NGO took it upon itself to fill this gap by working directly with the gay community around issues of awareness and prevention, the Ministry of Health ordered it to cease and desist, on the grounds that it was engaged in activities that fell outside of its jurisdiction.

What does all of this mean for young people themselves? According to Jorge, censorship has prevented him from 'imagining alternative ways of doing things.' That is to say, the suppression of alternative perspectives and approaches leaves young people with the sense that there is only one answer to any given problem, and that those who fall outside of the mainstream are not only wrong-headed, but evil.

Seclusion

As project ethnographers have made clear, seclusion is a strategy employed in both Villa del Mar and Villa del Sol to control or police young people's behaviour. Needless to say, its use is particularly widespread among adolescent girls, whose movements outside of the home are carefully circumscribed so as to prevent them from falling prey either to boys' advances or to their own sexual urges.

Moreover, it is also used to punish young people who fail to abide by the tenets of dominant discourses. Thus, 'unruly' children are often sent to denominational schools as a way of

enforcing strict standards of behaviour upon them, since the latter are known for their disciplinarian approach and ability to restrict students' access to the outside world. Among those who do not wish or cannot afford to send their children away to a religious school, other forms of seclusion are used, including physical confinement or relocation to the home of another family member elsewhere in the country. As one might imagine, the most common reasons why young people are subjected to these forms of punishment are 'promiscuity' (in the case of young women), and drug or alcohol consumption (for young men).

Exile

However, in those instances where seclusion fails to have its desired effect, non-conformist youth are faced with a battery of increasingly severe forms of punishment. Exile is one such measure, and is deployed as a means of insulating the community from discursive challenges or contradictions.

Among those who are targeted in this way, many are young men or women who have chosen to adopt an openly homosexual lifestyle. In short, they are forced to leave their home town either to save their family from embarrassment, or as a way of avoiding the prejudice and violence of other community members. Other candidates for exile include women who become involved in the sex trade, or young people of both sexes who refuse to support the terms of the dominant gender order.

Categorization

Meanwhile, should 'undesirables' of the sort described above elect to stay in their home community against the wishes of their fellow citizens, they run the risk of categorization. In many ways a form of internal exile, this punishment is invoked when individuals are designated as deviants, prompting other community members to ostracize and ignore them, lest they wish to be considered deviant themselves. As one might imagine, the most common labels deployed in this regard include prostitute, lesbian, gay, drug addict, atheist and criminal.

Physical and mental violence

Still, despite the undoubted pain and suffering inflicted upon young people by the instruments of control discussed in preceding paragraphs, physical and psychological violence remains the ultimate sanction to be used against those who cannot or will not conform. As our in-depth interviews with young people made clear, beatings are often administered to boys who engage in 'feminine' pastimes (such as playing with dolls), just as girls who dare to walk the streets by themselves are in danger of being sexually assaulted or raped. Moreover, even in cases where there is no physical violence, 'deviant' youth, such as effeminate men or masculine women, are forced to contend with a near constant stream of taunts and threats, engendering a climate of fear which is highly traumatizing in its own right.

Individual instruments of control: the internal watchdog

Although reference has already been made to the role of the internal watchdog in creating the conditions necessary for individuals to police themselves, thereby ensuring conformity with the principles of dominant discourses, in this section we cast further upon the workings of this 'watchdog' by means of two examples drawn from the in-depth interviews.

In the first instance, we consider the case of Maikol, who was 14 years of age when he participated in this study. During the course of our interview with him, he admitted that he used to enjoy playing with dolls and braiding his girl-friends' hair. He would also experiment with make up, try on earrings and wear his female siblings' clothes, until one day his mother surprised him in the midst of putting on a dress. Although he was punished for doing so, his enjoyment of 'feminine' pastimes was such that it was not long before he was caught once again, prompting his parents to becoming increasingly forceful in their punishments, beating him and locking him in his room for hours on end.

At the same time, family members also attempted to influence his behaviour through more subtle means. For example, his grandmother would often take him on long walks as a way of making him 'forget' his inappropriate urges, while his father and mother would constantly tell him that he was 'no good', that he would never be with a woman, that he would be ostracized and called a 'faggot'. Moreover, as Maikol himself made clear, these lessons eventually began to have an effect upon him:

My mother would hit me and tell me I shouldn't dress like a girl and that I was getting the wrong ideas in my head, and finally I stopped because they scolded me and gave me advice so that I wouldn't forget.

That these 'lessons' were successful in making Maikol 'forget' his former identity were only too clear to us when we met with him for an interview. Not only did he express gratitude to his parents for discouraging his 'bad habits', but he had adopted the manner and opinions of a typical Costa Rican male, arguing that women were the weaker sex and that they should behave in a suitably feminine fashion.

Meanwhile, Leidy is Maikol's mirror image. As a child, she loved to play football with boys, and would often steal away after dinner to hang out with them in the town square. However, she soon learned that this was not acceptable behaviour. Whenever she asked to go out and play, her mother would tell her to stay away from boys, since they were rough and would likely beat her up. In similar fashion, her aunt would turn away any boy who came to the door asking for her, saying that 'Leidy is a girl, she's not allowed to play on the street.'

Again, with time, these reinforcement techniques began to have an effect, prompting Leidy to adapt her behaviour in the face of societal expectations, and causing her to express thanks for the punishment she received as a child: 'my mother was right when she told me that men should stick with men and women with women. That's the way it should be.'

Having highlighted the degree to which parental reinforcement is capable of altering young people's behaviour patterns, we will now explore in detail the specific mechanisms used to foster self-discipline and conformity.

Observation

As is evident from the discussion above, children are subjected to constant surveillance, their every action scrutinized by any number of authority figures, including parents, grand-parents, teachers, physicians, and priests. Of course, constant scrutiny on the part of others prompts young people to be mindful of their own behaviour as well, and any action or characteristic that arouses the interest of observers immediately draws the attention of the child who is being watched.

Thus, children quickly learn that adults are extremely interested in gender-relevant behaviour, and all the more so if the latter does not correspond with dominant expectations and stereotypes. For example, when Adriana was a young child, she used to play with toy cars. However, she indicated that she quickly stopped once she realized that her mother was reacting 'oddly' whenever she started to play with them. Meanwhile, other participants reported having had analogous experiences, with Kenneth describing the anger directed towards him by his mother when she discovered him one day playing 'house' with a girl. As for Alberto, he was similarly upbraided when one of his parents entered his room to find him pretending to be a nurse. As he put it, 'my mother was so mad she hurled herself at me, telling me to take those clothes off, they look awful.' As punishment, he was sent to the fields and ordered to cut the grass. Finally, Guillermo indicated that although his mother never told him explicitly that he should refrain from playing 'house', she would always endeavour to make sure that he adopted the role of a male character, such as the 'father' or 'husband'.

Needless to say, underlying adults' concern that children behave in a manner 'appropriate' to their gender is their fixation upon the latter's genital anatomy, prompting children to pay attention to bodily attributes (*ie.* vagina, penis) that would otherwise arouse little or no interest. For example, Marianela admitted that she was completely ignorant of physical differences

between the sexes until they were explained to her in the first grade. In her words, 'before that, I thought all children were the same.'

Moreover, as sexual organs grow and become more mature, adults place increased importance upon the physical separation of boys and girls, with interaction between the sexes becoming ever more carefully circumscribed. For example, Juan remembers being bathed by his mother until he was roughly four years old, at which time she abruptly stopped, without telling him why. Similarly, both Santiago and Carlos indicated that they still recall the day when their parents told them that they must leave the washroom while their sisters were bathing.

Of course, in many ways these developments are reflective of broader changes in the adult-child relationship as the latter's sexual identity becomes more pronounced. How so? Quite simply, as parents' are made aware of the fact that their children are sexual beings (eg. because of penis or breast growth), certain forms of interaction are rendered taboo and off-limits. Thus, among young males in particular, overt signs of affection by fathers and other male relatives become increasingly rare, with research participants such as Jonathan and Guillerno reporting that, while their fathers used to hug and kiss them, they now never do so..

Finally, the emphasis placed by adults upon genital organs also serves to encourage young people to discuss and compare them among themselves, often in ways that foster shame and self-consciousness. For instance, Carlos described occasions when he would get together with friends and they would each take off their trousers in order to determine who had the largest penis. This caused Carlos no end of embarrassment, since his penis was small and the other boys would make fun of it. As for young women, the principal object of comparison are the breasts, with Hilda in particular indicating that she has always felt ashamed of them, both on account of the fact that she started to develop at an early age, and because boys would often 'make comments and joke about the size of them.'

As one might imagine, this latter point is significant, highlighting as it does the fact that surveillance does not cease when children leave their home. Indeed, if anything, it becomes more intense as they grow older, with teachers, priests and other community members taking it

upon themselves to observe the behaviour of the children under their care, and intervene should there be any evidence of 'abnormality'.

David's experience is typical in this regard. Somewhat effeminate in appearance and manner, his aunt approached his mother one day when he was still quite young, in order to tell her that she found his conduct 'odd' and that she should really 'do something' about it. Others followed in his aunt's footsteps, warning his parents of the dangers of such behaviour and advising him on how he might go about changing it. Of course, given this background, one is hardly surprised when David remarks (as he did during the course of our interview with him): 'I feel like I'm weird and different, like something that's sick.'

Indeed, if adults' scrutiny has any effect at all, it ensures that children exercise self-surveillance in order to curb any affectation or behaviour that might arouse the censure of those around them, whether authority figures or members of their own peer group. In this way, the need for coercive force diminishes until it becomes almost superfluous. Not only are individuals socialized to think carefully about the consequences to any action they might undertake, but they are also trained to keep a watchful eye on their friends and colleagues, and remind them if they step out of line. For example, several interview participants reported feeling angry whenever their friends complain about having to go to church, or when they talk among themselves during the service.

Confession

Reference has already been made to the central role played by confession within Christianity. Quite simply, it offers believers a chance to cleanse themselves of the effects of evil thoughts and actions, but only if they are willing to reveal their sins, admit their guilt and ask for forgiveness.

Regardless of the degree to which such a mechanism is (or is not) useful in helping one cope with personal difficulties or traumatic experiences, there can be little doubt that it facilitates

surveillance and control of the population. How so? On the one hand, it encourages individuals to categorize their thoughts and feelings, and hide or repress those that are deemed 'improper' whenever they are subject to the gaze of parents, priests or other authority figures.

On the other hand, by 'naturalizing' the confessor-penitent relationship, and by associating it with personal development and catharsis, the stage is set for its progressive encroachment upon other walks of life, until such time that individuals' every thought and action are laid bare to any number of self-declared experts, whether psychologists, social workers, lawyers or marriage counsellors.

Tools and resources of the internal watchdog

Thus, while one might point to several factors that are involved in fostering the internal watchdog within each individual, once in place the latter is able to draw upon a wide range of mechanisms to ensure compliance with the tenets of hegemonic discourses.

Few are as significant in this regard as one's memory. That is to say, children quickly learn that, if they are to escape the censure of their parents and community, they must forget or repress 'inappropriate' feelings and desires. Moreover, they are also taught to avoid critical thinking whenever possible, lest they uncover discursive contradictions or expose the arbitrary nature of societal prohibitions and taboos.

A second means by which self-control is exercised is through the association of illegitimate thoughts and activities with natural physiological reactions to unpleasant stimuli. In this way, young people learn to equate 'perverse' sex acts, including cunnilingus, masturbation and anal penetration, with 'unclean' bodily processes such as urination and defecation. Thus, any temptation they may feel to experiment sexually is counterbalanced by the fact that these activities are perceived to be 'naturally' disgusting.

THE SEXUAL CONSTRUCTION OF LATIN YOUTH

Moreover, similar forces are at work when young people are taught to feel shame in response to the exposure of certain parts of their body, specifically those organs associated with reproduction and sexual pleasure (eg. the breasts, penis or rectum). Indeed, one might even go so far as to argue that these feelings of shame extend to anything vaguely related to one's sexuality, including romantic fantasies and sexual language.

Of course, closely related to the shame that many young people feel when they look at their body in a mirror or purchase condoms in a neighbourhood store is the guilt underlying their relationship with parents and other family members. That is to say, children, far from being encouraged to see themselves as independent, autonomous human beings, are constantly reminded that they are mere appendages, whose every word and act reflects upon the family which raised them. Needless to say, this in turn forces children to be ever-mindful of their behaviour, lest they embarrass their parents or bring their name into disrepute (for example, by becoming pregnant outside of marriage or adopting an openly gay lifestyle)..

X

Contradictions and Compartmentalization

Background

During the course of this work, it has been our contention that young people do not internalize hegemonic discourses as though their minds were blank slates upon which information can be inscribed at will. Rather, they modify and mediate discourses even as they assimilate them. Often arising from contradictions, these modifications provide adolescents with the necessary space for them to choose among different norms and practices or, in certain cases, to challenge outright the terms of discursive domination.

Moreover, this study has identified three *alternative* discourses (*ie.* erotic, romantic and feminist) around which much of young people's resistance is centred. Without wishing to suggest that the latter necessarily complement one another, they are similar to the extent that they all promote egalitarian, non-dualist sexual models. Thus, even though they are open to manipulation by hegemonic forces, their links with 'official' discourses are tenuous, and are as likely to undermine the latter as be coopted by them.

Origins of contradictions

As one might imagine, the complexity of the dominant social order is such that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to identify the precise source of contradictions undermining a particular discourse at any given moment in time. However, by the same token we would argue

that the following factors must be taken into account if one is come to terms with the dynamic of change discernable in Costa Rica today.

In the first instance, it is clear that economic (under)development does have a role to play in rendering individuals either more or less responsive to the tenets of dominant discourses. Quite simply, if one lives in a marginal community where medical facilities are rustic or non-existent, it is unlikely that one will be in a position to comply with the principles championed in national reproductive health campaigns.

Along a somewhat different vein, discursive contradictions are also generated by broad-based changes in the social fabric. In the case of Costa Rica, these include the influx of large numbers of North Americans, who brought with them evangelical Protestant religions that are becoming increasingly vocal in their attempt to challenge the religious supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, if this were not enough, hegemonic gender discourses are being challenged by young people who have been exposed to - and internalized - the arguments made by international feminism against continued male dominance.

Finally, there can be little doubt that technological advances also have a part to play in the development of contradictions. To cite but one example, the fact that the birth control pill is now available to a wide swathe of the country's female population has had far-reaching effects in a number of areas, loosening the grip of patriarchal discourses upon women's lives, while rendering many of the Church's sexual teachings seem irrelevant and backward.

Contradictions and young people

As our interviews and group sessions with young people made clear, they are well aware of the contradictions inherent in the sexual messages they are subjected to on a day-to-day basis. Even in primary school, their teachers' unwillingness to discuss anything vaguely related to

sexuality and reproduction is interpreted by them to mean that the subject is too indecent to be broached, and that adults are simply too insecure to raise it any case.

Meanwhile, as children grow older, the contradictions become increasingly stark. Thus, while girls are told to abstain from sex until their wedding night, boys are encouraged to have as many relationships as possible. Whereas both boys and girls are taught to view marriage as the only form of union acceptable in the eyes of God, they look around their community and see many types of relationship co-existing side by side.

Moreover, soap operas and fashion magazines are continuously emphasizing the importance of romantic love, making girls and young women feel that they must provide their boy-friends with 'proof' of their affection, for example by consenting to sex. However, this in turn is countered by their mothers, who tell them to distrust men, and by the experiences of friends and family-members who have been abandoned by their boy-friends as soon as they become pregnant.

In this way, even as young people assimilate contradictory norms such as those described above, they are cannot help but compare them to their own realities, in the process realizing that those who demand high standards of behaviour from them are often those who are most hypocritical in their own sexual lives and practices.

Villa del Mar

As one might imagine, widespread socio-economic marginalization in Villa del Mar ensures that the gap between what is demanded of young people in the realm of sex, and what is actually possible in light of the circumstances in which they find themselves is particularly wide. Thus, at the same time that community members place great stock upon the supernatural and the spiritual as means of compensating for their lack of material prosperity, their bodies remain the principal tool through which they seek to obtain recognition and pleasure.

This is an important point, serving to highlight the disjuncture between what is desirable and what is possible within a given social context. In other words, young people in Villa del Mar champion marriage and other Christian values precisely because they offer hope for the future, even if the best they can expect right now is bodily pleasure through whatever means possible.

As way of example, consider the life-histories of Raquel and Wendy. Aged 14 and 17 respectively, both have grown up in poverty-stricken, single-parent households. Moreover, both are what might be described as 'conservative' in matters of sex, with Wendy in particular emphasizing the importance of pre-marital virginity and a relationship model based upon a male breadwinner and female nurturer who is willing to make sacrifices for the sake of her husband and family. However, in spite of her strong support for Christian mores, she admitted to having sex with several young men during the course of recent years, though she went on to argue that her actions did not matter 'because [she] didn't feel a thing.'

As for Raquel, she was even more forceful in defending the Christian position on sex and sexuality. As she put it, 'for a woman to be respected, she has to dress in white when she walks down the aisle. Otherwise, she's nothing but a whore.' However, as she was questioned further on her views and background, contradictions began to emerge. In the first instance, she revealed that her mother currently co-habitates with a man who is not her husband, and has done so on two occasions in the past. Then, after stating in the first interview session that she had never had sex before, she subsequently conceded that this was untrue. In short, not only did she admit that she had had her first sexual encounter at age 11, but she indicated as well that she has slept with a number of boys since that time.

Gender differences

In the personal interviews and focus group sessions, young people's responsiveness to particular sexual discourses differed considerably according to whether they were men or women. Thus, whereas almost all of the participants in Villa del Mar - of both sexes - voiced strong support for Christian mores and values, men were far more likely to interpret the latter

through the lens of 'eroticism' and prevailing gender discourses. How so? In short, even as they are told that it is important to avoid sex outside the bounds of marriage, male youth are also aware that their reputation will be enhanced if they have many partners and appear knowledgeable in the area of love-making strategies and techniques.

By contrast, female participants placed considerably more stock on the tenets of romanticism, using it as a counterweight to that which is demanded of them under the terms of dominant gender and religious discourses. In particular, young women draw upon the concept of romantic love as a basis upon which to imagine something *other* than the drudgery, violence and inequity that characterize most of the relationships around them. Moreover, it also offers them a means of escaping religious prohibitions on extra-marital sex, to the degree that it is possible to claim that one was blinded by love, and thus driven to do something that one would never have done under 'normal' circumstances.

Of course, this is not to suggest that men are completely immune from the precepts of romantic love themselves. Among those whom we interviewed, several young men indicated that they had fallen in love, and it was clear that this had prompted them to change some of their views regarding women and personal relationships. Quite simply, not only did they now draw a distinction between women in general and their beloved, but they also resisted the urge to look upon their girl-friend as though she were merely a trophy-piece or sexual object, while defending her from the gossip and jokes of their male peer group.

Villa del Sol

As one might imagine, the emphasis which young people living in Villa del Mar place upon bodily pleasure is not nearly as strongly marked in this community. Material success and academic excellence are within the grasp of the bulk of the town's adolescent population, and thus most have little incentive to engage in physical violence, break the law or experiment sexually with animals (all of which are common pastimes for Villa del Mar youth).

Moreover, it should also be noted that young men in Villa del Sol are far less likely to adopt a strongly misogynist perspective. In short, not only are they familiar with the basic tenets of liberal feminism, but they are aware of the potential benefits to be derived from a partner who is educated and in a position to enhance household earning power through a career of her own. Of course, in this regard it is no coincidence that steady employment is far easier to come by in Villa del Sol than it is in Villa del Mar, ensuring that men need not feel threatened by a woman who is the family's principal breadwinner.

Meanwhile, among Villa del Sol's young women, interviews and focus groups served to highlight the fact that they generally had little respect for religious and romantic discourses, which they saw as perpetuating female passivity and exploitation. Instead, they tended to adopt a broadly feminist perspective, in which happiness was associated with a career on the one hand and, on the other, a stable marriage founded upon principles of equality and fairness. Needless to say, it was precisely this latter objective that made most female participants shy away from feminism in its more radical incarnations.

Discursive contradictions and tolerance of homosexuality

Christian doctrine is unequivocal in its condemnation of homosexuality, which it lambasts as a repugnant sin, and an affront before the eyes of God. After all, were not Adam and Eve given explicit instructions to be fruitful and multiply? While members of the religious hierarchy may be quick to mobilize such arguments as they attempt to convince all who will listen of the evils of homosexuality, a substantial proportion of study participants reported having friendships or regular social contact with openly gay individuals. However, as surprised as some may be by this finding, it should be noted that not all young people were equally tolerant, with Villa del Mar youth generally being far more open-minded in this regard than their counterparts in Villa del Sol.

While we must ask ourselves why this is the case, it is first necessary to address a more fundamental question: has modernity brought in its wake greater or lesser acceptance of gay

practice and lifestyles? Certainly, there are some writers who contend that scientific advances, urbanization and mass education have provided the basis for a more enlightened attitude in this area (Weeks 1985). However, evidence presented by other scholars, Michel Foucault most notable among them, challenges this view. In short, this latter group would argue that modernity has, to a significant degree, *created* homosexuality, with the emergent discipline of psychiatry taking it upon itself to identify - and stamp out - such 'abnormality' in the population (Foucault 1978). While this is not to suggest that homosexuals were looked upon in a favourable light in the pre-modern era, as attested to by the zeal with which most European regimes executed men accused of sodomy, persecution remained at a minimum because it was a particular set of practices that were proscribed, rather than a sexual identity *per se*.

Thus, psychiatry's 'contribution' was to transform homosexuality into a mental illness in need of medical investigation and intervention, thereby justifying any number of highly questionable forms of therapy (ranging from lobotomies to induced vomiting) in the pursuit of a 'cure'. As one might imagine, it is precisely for this reason that homosexuality has come to be associated with perversion and sickness in modern industrial societies, Villa del Sol included. However, as we will endeavour to make clear in the discussion below, young people in Villa del Mar have been raised in a rather different cultural context, one that makes use of a classification system based upon criteria other than 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual'.

Let us consider this claim in further detail. Quite simply, findings derived from ethnographic observation, interviews and focus groups show that individuals living in Villa del Mar tend to look upon homosexuality as a form of gender inversion, in which men adopt feminine characteristics while women adopt masculine ones. Moreover, since sexual orientation is deemed to be grounded in one's genes, there is little attempt to ascribe blame. Instead, individuals who engage in same-sex relationships are categorized in a manner identical to everyone else: according to their relative 'activity' or 'passivity'. In effect, this means that men who are domineering and aggressive - stereotypically masculine characteristics - can engage in sexual contact with other men without being thought of as gay. Indeed, in this regard one might argue that same-sex relationships are seen in the same light as adulterous affairs and bestiality; while all are forbidden by the Church, they are attractive to men because they provide the latter with an opportunity to assert their manliness through the domination of others.

By contrast, Villa del Sol youth are less tolerant of homosexuality precisely because it is associated with an abhorrent and frightening Other. That is to say, it is understood to derive from 'abnormalities' in a child's psychological development, resulting in deviant adults whose sexual habits are not only perverse, but capable of entrapping 'normal' individuals as well. It is for this reason that young people in Villa del Sol are reticent to admit that they know someone who is gay, let alone that they are friends with this individual. Of course, also pertinent in this regard is the fact that homosexuality is seen as a challenge to the established social order, calling into question all that heterosexual society holds dear.

Discourses and compartmentalization

Even as one acknowledges the willingness of some individuals to mount a frontal assault upon the tenets of dominant discourses, for most young people acceptance is preferable to confrontation. Indeed, among those whom we interviewed, very few could conceive of alternative means of organizing gender relations or the sexual division of labour. Instead, most of these individuals have attempted to structure their lives in such a way that they are able to reconcile discursive contradictions, with compartmentalization proving to be one the principal strategies used in this regard. How so? Quite simply, the adoption of such an approach allows individuals to resolve differences among the various discourses by adjusting their behaviour to match the surroundings or circumstances in which they find themselves at any given moment in time.

As way of example, let us consider the case of Maria. Born and raised in Villa del Mar, she lives with her mother, step-father and step-sister. Her mother works at a restaurant, while her step-father, who drinks heavily, finds sporadic employment as a fisherman and seller of lottery tickets. Moreover, her parents' relationship is highly dysfunctional, characterized by binge drinking, extra-marital affairs, and extreme violence on the part of the step-father towards Maria's mother.

As for Maria herself, while she is constantly admonished by her mother to be careful around boys and to 'save' herself for marriage, male class-mates never miss an opportunity to make lewd comments and fondle her breasts. If this were not traumatizing enough, Maria's step-father began to abuse her sexually while her mother was away at work, and raped her when she was only 12 years old. Left bleeding in her bedroom, she was too afraid to seek help because he had threatened to kill her mother should she tell anyone about this incident.

Over the course of subsequent years, the fear she felt towards her step-father made her spend more and more time away from home, either visiting with friends or in the company of a young man who would soon become her boy-friend. They had not been dating long when she consented to have sex with him, despite her strong support for Christian mores and pre-marital abstinence. When asked about this seeming paradox, she replied,

I don't really know why I did it. I guess when you fall in love you lose your head and do things to prove your affection. I had such a terrible experience with my step-father that I wanted to do it on my own with someone I love.

Needless to say, 'losing one's head' is central to the compartmentalization process, providing young people with an opportunity to justify acts that run counter to stated beliefs and principles, while preserving the illusion of behavioural consistency. To return once again to the words of Maria in face of further probing by the interviewer, 'I've never stopped believing in virginity and fidelity. When I had sex with him, I wasn't myself, it wasn't the normal Maria.' Though there are some uncharitable observers who might argue that Maria was simply using love-induced madness as a convenient cover for hypocrisy, in fact there is every reason to believe that she was sincere in her explanation. After all, one of the defining features of compartmentalization is the fact that it is grounded in the subconscious, from which repressed urges and desires are only allowed to escape in response to a particular set of triggering mechanisms, of which unbridled passion and alcohol-induced intoxication are two examples.

However, they are not the only ones; time and space are also highly relevant in this regard, as is attested to by Luis' experience. In our interview with him, he reported having had regular

sexual contact with a male study partner while the two are alone in his parents' house: 'I've told him we shouldn't do it, that it's wrong, but when he starts to touch me I get so hot I can't stop. He takes advantage of how horny I am.' When asked why he continues to schedule the study sessions at a time when his parents are away, he said simply that 'this is when the house is least noisy.' Obviously, it has not occurred to him that he is himself implicated in the decision to continue having a relationship with his friend, by virtue of the fact that he is choosing the time and place to meet, 'forgetting' that it is precisely because his parents are not home that sexual contact is possible.

In this way, Luis' actions are reflective both of a polarized mental state (*ie.* between rationality and irrationality) and, at a more general level, of the bifurcation of physical space (and time) into zones of pleasure and abstinence, law and chaos, godliness and licentiousness. Thus, ethnographic observation undertaken in both communities highlighted a stark contrast between locales associated with 'official' discourses (*eg.* schools, churches, and department stores), and those where forbidden pleasures and pursuits are allowed to manifest themselves openly (*eg.* bars, discotheques, beaches, brothels and pool halls).

Moreover, one might argue that each of these spaces embodies a particular set of taboos and prohibitions, grounded in the compartmentalization process described above. Most obvious among these are restrictions associated with gender. Whereas men enjoy unlimited access to spaces of pleasure thanks to the continuing dominance of patriarchal discourses, women may only gain ingress in special circumstances (*ie.* within the context of holidays or rites of passage), or at the cost of becoming known as promiscuous and 'easy'. In a similar vein, the movement of sexual minorities (be they gay men, lesbians, transvestites or sex trade workers) is also restricted, though in opposite fashion. That is to say, strict limitations are placed upon their access to sites, such as churches and schools, where 'normal' standards and mores apply; if they wish to visit these locales, they must either disguise their identity, or be willing to face ridicule and abuse.

As one might imagine, several consequences arise from this state of affairs. In the first instance, it affords hegemonic forces the opportunity to discipline and dominate marginalized groups, such as gay men and women, by 'keeping them in their place', whether at home under

the watchful eyes of their fathers and brothers, or out of sight in neighbourhoods where 'decent' (*ie.* heterosexual) members of society would not dare venture.

Secondly, it promotes a lack of reflexivity among young people in their handling of issues pertaining to sex. Among many of the study participants, there was a strongly marked tendency to engage in abrupt behavioural changes depending upon the circumstances and locale in which they found themselves. Thus, as one of the project ethnographers was surprised to discover, young women who were usually shy and demure at home would become sexually aggressive and gregarious while on an outing to the beach. Of course, it need hardly be added that such sudden shifts in attitude and demeanor do not encourage the adoption of safe sex practices, since to do so would imply that one had not 'lost one's head' after all.

Finally, one might argue that the bifurcation of physical space into zones of pleasure and self-denial is reflective of a similar distinction made between legitimate and illegitimate sexuality. Quite simply, whereas most young people tend to associate the former with matrimony, procreation and the home (*ie.* private space), the latter is generally seen in far more alluring terms, embodying such qualities as danger, eroticism and passion. In turn, this means that young people (particularly men), upon marrying and starting families of their own, will continue to believe that sex can only be truly exciting if it is forbidden, prompting them to seek it out regardless of the risk to themselves and their relationships.

XI

Formal Resistance to Discourses

Background

Given that power exercised through discourses necessarily benefits some groups more than others, acts of resistance are inevitable. For the purposes of this study, we take the latter to refer to any expression, conscious or unconscious, of rejection of one or more principles of a dominant discourse. Moreover, it should also be noted that resistance can either be formal or informal. Informal resistance, an issue that will be addressed in detail in the following chapter, is by definition inchoate and unfocused, and may involve anything from refusing to go to mass on a Sunday, to girls who choose to have sexual intercourse prior to marriage. In both cases, the tenets of dominant discourses are being called into question, yet there is no underlying agenda, nor are individuals necessarily even aware that they are engaging in an act of resistance; in many cases, their purpose is merely to assert a measure of independence from their parents.

Meanwhile, formal acts of resistance are more focused, and are often characterized by the mobilization of counter-hegemonic discourses as means of confronting and resisting the status quo. Among the research participants, feminism, romanticism and eroticism featured particularly prominently in this regard, though it should be emphasized that their capacity to affect change is undermined by the contexts from which they emerge. That is to say, not only do romanticism and eroticism trace their origins to a distant past in which the prevailing discourses were quite different from those today, but none is broad-based enough to mount an effective challenge against present-day sexual culture *in general*. However, this is not to suggest that such discourses are entirely without subversive effect, as we will endeavour to show in the discussion that follows.

Erotic discourses

As Foucault makes clear, eroticism's roots lie in pre-Christian pagan societies, particularly Classical Greece. For the most part, these cultures did not seek to circumscribe the sexual practices of their citizens in a manner that would be familiar to us today. Rather, in Greece if not elsewhere, concern was focused instead upon means of ensuring that free men did not become overly caught up in a life of hedonism (Foucault 1987).

It is in this context that self-control (*enkateia*) was championed. That is to say, even as Greek thinkers recognized (and celebrated) the joys to be derived from such pursuits as eating, drinking and sex, they called upon individuals to restrict their pleasure-seeking activities to those times and places when 'need, moment and function' were in harmony (Foucault 1988:51). In effect, this meant that one should control one's urges in public (need), only engage in sexual activity when one was suitably prepared to do so (moment); and always endeavour to make sure that partners behaved in a manner appropriate to their social status (function). So long as these guidelines were adhered to, no particular act was forbidden; body and pleasure were as one (Dover 1989; Cantarella 1992).

However, if the views described above were representative of mainstream opinion in Ancient Greece, by no means is this to suggest that dissent was non-existent, as attested to by the numerous schools of oppositional thought which arose in the latter centuries of the Classical era. Without wishing to overstate their effect upon dominant mores and values within Greek society itself, they clearly provided much inspiration for early Christian ascetics, whose views on sex remain influential within Christianity to this day (Bullough 1979).

Male erotic discourses

Focused upon the body and its pleasures, modern-day eroticism provides a potent counterweight to the deadening impact of dominant sexual mores and values. Although it is essentially a *male* discourse, typified by such sub-cultures as those associated with bars, sports clubs, street gangs and brothels, it does not necessarily exclude women, so long as they are willing to abide by its principles and share in its outlook. Needless to say, its subversiveness lies in its opposition to 'respectable' forms of sexual oppression, which it challenges through the celebration of 'deviant' sexualities embodied by the street and those who might be found there, whether prostitutes, adulterers, gay men, lesbians or transgressors of categories.

Among those whom we interviewed, it is clear that 'street' sexuality holds a strong appeal. Not only did Aaron recount an incident in which his friend lost his virginity to a prostitute, but Mainor described in vivid detail a recent visit to a brothel:

It was some experience. I went with a group of friends and we were all up on the dance-floor with the whores. I began to act provocatively and then one of them grabbed my dick. I got so hot that I came right there in her hand, and the best thing was that I didn't have to pay a cent.

Meanwhile, others derive pleasure from simply harassing sex-trade workers and others whom they consider deviant. As Jorge made clear, young men from Villa del Sol would frequently travel to downtown San José in order to 'tease' any transvestite they might find there: 'they say really dirty stuff to us and we'll answer right back with even filthier things.' Although the potential for violence is omnipresent in these exchanges, one might nonetheless argue that the two groups are joined together by a common language of pleasure, a fact alluded to by Jorge during the course of our discussion: 'I love to go because we talk dirty to each other, and you won't find vulgarity like that anywhere else.'

Certainly, the street appears to offer ample scope for expressions of sexuality that hegemonic forces would condemn as perverted. For example, Carlos indicated that he and his friends would routinely congregate in a vacant lot to masturbate and compare the size of their

respective penises. As for Maikol, he described occasions when he would get together with a group of young men in order to seduce and later have sex with young girls. As he put it, 'I feel funny fucking girls that young, but they're into it and everybody's doing it.' Meanwhile, others recounted experiences they and their friends have had with animals, with Carlos in particular describing an occasion when his cousin forced the family dog to lick and suck his penis.

Of course, it is not only young men who are engaging in 'deviant' forms of sexual contact; as several participants indicated to us, they are well aware of the fact that anyone - even highly respected members of the community - are capable of falling prey to their sexual urges. Thus, while Frederico indicated that he has seen the parish priest on several occasions drinking and carousing with unmarried women, another participant was surprised to discover a policeman in the midst of an adulterous affair:

Not that long ago I was walking by a hotel where they rent out rooms by the hour, and who did I see coming out but the policeman with one of the neighbourhood women who goes to my church. I would never have imagined that she would get involved with a young man, especially since he just got married four months ago and already he's trying to get it on the sly.

Still, whatever one's opinion of the incidents described above, they all exemplify what is perhaps the most salient feature of erotic discourses: their emphasis upon the transgression of conventional sexual mores and values. Thus, within this context there is scope for flexibility and experimentation, even among men who would never willingly self-identify as gay or bisexual. As David, a young homosexual man, made clear,

you never know what to expect when you go into a room alone. Masculine men will often ask you to stick your finger up their ass, talk dirty to them, or treat them like a dog. I like to feel like a woman and don't particularly like it when a man grabs my balls and sucks them, but life is full of surprises.

Meanwhile, Kenneth has had similar experiences, albeit from a heterosexual perspective:

Women often enjoy being sadistic and biting you. When I'm half drunk I like a woman to do everything to me and for her to take the initiative. Doing the same thing all the time is boring. One woman made me suck her ass and afterwards she hit me with her belt.

Needless to say, implicit within these 'erotic' encounters is a restructuring of conventional relations of power, in which male dominance is replaced, at least temporarily, by a somewhat more egalitarian relationship dynamic. Interestingly, this perspective appears to be confirmed when one compares the different words used to represent the body within the context of gender and erotic discourses.

Thus, whereas the former tends to draw upon violent, power-laden imagery in its description of the vagina (hole, slit) and the penis (staff, snake), the latter generally makes use of far more benign metaphors, such as papaya or pumpkin for a woman's vagina, and banana or sausage for a man's penis. In this way, the conventional view of men and women's sexual anatomy, in which one is expected to dominate and penetrate the other, is replaced by an understanding based upon mutual benefit and pleasure.

Moreover, eroticism also calls into question the mainstream belief that sex is dirty and should always be kept hidden away within the confines of the bedroom. Indeed, among those who took part in this study, many reported engaging in practices which run directly counter to mainstream sexual mores, for example through participation in 'circle jerks' where several young men get together to masturbate after watching a pornographic film. To cite Carlos,

once you get a little horny, you start touching it. Soon, all your buddies are ready and willing and then one will start jacking off someone else until everyone's come.

Sharing sexual fantasies with each other is another way in which male participants derive pleasure, with pornographic magazines and videos playing an important role in galvanizing the imagination. Of course, it should be noted that the latter are often used for 'educational' purposes as well, since it is quite common for young people of both communities to go to parties whose principal purpose is to screen pornographic films. Not only did many participants indicate that it was precisely on occasions such as these that they saw the sex act performed for the first time, but several commented that they continue to watch them in order to learn new love-making techniques.

Female erotic discourses

As we have endeavoured to highlight in the discussion above, male erotic discourses differ from those associated with patriarchy or the Church in that they fault no one, male or female, for engaging in acts from which they derive pleasure. While some might argue that it is scarcely surprising that men should be the principal proponents of this discourse, since they do not have to worry about becoming pregnant or being gang-raped while walking home in the evening, this is not to suggest that women are necessarily opposed to it. Indeed, as our interviews made clear, female adolescents are if anything more unhappy than boys with the demands placed upon them in matters of sex: that they should 'save' themselves for marriage; that they should not venture out of the home unaccompanied; and that they should avoid any activity that lends itself to sexual self-discovery.

Thus, even as one acknowledges the reticence of female participants to engage openly with erotic discourses during the course of interview and group sessions, their willingness to discuss related topics, such as romantic fantasies, underscored the degree to which they too subscribed to many of the tenets of eroticism.

'Secret' boy-friends are a case in point. For example, Wendoly indicated that she has been involved in such a relationship for more than a year, taking advantage of the fact that her parents work during the day to go over to his house after school. Although they had abstained

from physical contact for much of this time, they had recently begun to 'make out', an experience that left Wendoly feeling feverish and flushed:

I felt an emptiness, an emptiness in my stomach, as though I had never eaten a thing in my entire life and my eyes were all watery. I felt as though I had a fever, my body trembled all over. I don't know why, but I remained very quiet all day long.

Alexandra's case is similar. Forbidden to have a boy-friend because she is (in her mother's estimation) too young, she has gone ahead anyway, avoiding detection by always ensuring that her parents are out when he comes over. Moreover, she went to admit that he is very forward, and will often push her to see how far she is prepared to go. The incident described below is typical in this regard.

Once my mother went dancing and we were left alone with my brother and sister-in-law. Anyway, we were in the living room and decided to turn out the light. We were lying down on the couch, talking about things, teasing and joking, and then, all of a sudden, we started to kiss .. and soon he was kissing me here and there, and my body was saying yes, but suddenly I started thinking, God forbid, and then I decided that I should turn on the light before this got too far.

Meanwhile, dancing is another example of female participants' engagement with eroticism. In short, not only does it give young women scope to challenge the passive role ascribed to them by machismo and the Church, but it also provides them with an opportunity to engage in a non-hierarchical, body-oriented experience.

Not surprisingly, parents are also sensitive to these issues, and this is precisely why many forbid their daughters from attending dances, or else insist that they be chaperoned at all times by an older sibling or adult. However, as the interview findings clearly show, young women have adopted a number of strategies in order to by-pass or subvert the restrictions placed upon them. Thus, while Daisy takes advantage of visits to some of her more permissive relatives to

go out to nightclubs, others, such as Rosangela, sneak out of their house while their parents are sleeping or otherwise occupied. In all cases, however, participants stressed their love of music and the way that it made them feel good about themselves. To quote Alexandra,

The music, that's what I love most; any kind of music will do. Not like my mother, who dies when you put on reggae and says that it's dirty and not really music at all. Anyway, I love it all: salsa, romantic, merengue, everything, and if it's good dance music, so much the better.

Along somewhat different lines, the interviews and group sessions also showed that young women harbour erotic desires and fantasies that fly in the face of dominant societal expectations as to what female sexuality should and should not entail. For example, while several participants indicated that they enjoy nothing more than watching men as they walk down the street, others said that they went to sports matches simply to ogle their muscular bodies and hairy legs.

Moreover, it was clear that many of the female participants had exceedingly rich fantasy lives, as attested to by Daisy's dreams of 'making love on a rainy day with romantic music.' Similarly, Hilda indicated that she often imagines herself having sex in a park or public washroom, anywhere that she would run the risk of being seen. Of course, nourishing these fantasies are the stories young women tell each other about the joys of sex and the attractive men they have seen at school, on the beach or in magazines.

Thus, even though women are forced to contend with far greater pressure than men to avoid any and all sexual contact prior to marriage, many draw upon erotic discourses in their pursuit of alternative means of expressing their sexuality. One such means is 'petting', consisting of intense hugging, kissing and manual stimulation, which is undertaken with lovers and other male friends 'with rights'. Needless to say, the latter group is particularly interesting in this regard, encompassing young men whom a particular woman has bestowed the 'right' to make love to her without expecting any commitment in return.

As one might imagine, it is but a short step from petting to genital intercourse, and though few of the girls and young women interviewed were willing to discuss this issue explicitly, in many cases such activity could be inferred from the anecdotes they related about the experiences of girl-friends and female family members. For example, Alexandra was quite adamant that all of her friends had already had sex:

Of my three best friends, I'm almost sure none of them are virgin. You see, two of them went with their boy-friends to sleep by a river and the other one went on a trip with her boy-friend and didn't come back until the day before yesterday. They lied to their mothers and told them they were going to visit some relatives but the truth is that they were with their boy-friends. According to them, they didn't do anything, but who's going to believe they slept by the river with their boy-friends and they didn't do anything?

Certainly, there can be little doubt that many boy-friends are exceedingly insistent in this regard, as the passage below suggests.

After a few months he had asked me so many times to give in, to give him my virginity as proof of my love, that one day we were alone and went to a beach, I felt so much desire, it felt so good to have him touch me all over, that I couldn't resist. Next thing I knew it he was penetrating me. Sometimes you have this uncontrollable urge. [Leidy]

Lesbian relationships are another form of erotic transgression that most female participants would not admit to, even if it was obvious that some had prior experience in this area. In particular, a number of young women noted that they had been propositioned or harassed by lesbians in the past, with Dunia stating that on several occasions she has been faced with women who call her 'cutie' or 'sweetie', and who 'flirt openly' with her. Meanwhile, in our interview with Hilda, she asserted that 'most of [her] friends have had little flings with other girl-friends,' and went on to describe an encounter she had had some years previously:

When I was about six years old I had a little thing with the girl next-door. We used to kiss and kiss. I had forgotten what we used to do until I talked to a friend at school about it and then I remembered. I think my first attraction was to this girl-friend. I loved her very much and she was my best friend.

Romantic discourses

For the most part, scholars agree that the notion of romantic love originated in the cultural context of twelfth century Europe, when stories of errant knights and virtuous, unattainable women first began to circulate among the elites of the day. In these works, love was platonic and rarely consummated, with heroic men undertaking seemingly impossible quests for the sake of their lady's honour (Johnson 1983).

Although it has undergone substantial change over the course of intervening centuries, this tradition of romantic love remains with us to this day, and is continuously disseminated through such channels as television soap operas, music and film. Indeed, as Johnson (1983) makes clear, its power to give meaning to individuals' lives is, if anything, more powerful than ever, replacing mysticism as the path to true happiness and sublimation.

Moreover, our interview findings show that romantic discourses hold considerable appeal for both men and women. In the case of the latter, they offer a means of resisting and subverting the sexual mores embodied by Christianity and Science. Meanwhile, romanticism affords men the possibility of having a relationship that transcends the vulgar objectification typical of mainstream gender discourses. In this way, having Idealized the woman they are involved with, they become willing to make sacrifices on her behalf, and shelter her from the barbs, gossip and insults that men routinely direct towards women whom they consider to be sexually active.

As one might imagine, passion plays a key role in this regard, as it used to justify and explain behaviour that runs counter to personal self-interest, as well as the tenets of dominant discourses. That is to say, individuals who are in love are expected to devote themselves whole-heartedly to their partner, regardless of the consequences. Indeed, it is precisely on this basis that romantic discourses sanction pre-marital intercourse and other sexual practices condemned by the Church, presenting them as signs of each partner's undying love for the other.

While one can scarcely describe romanticism as a feminist discourse - after all, many would argue that its emphasis on essentialist identities serves only to *reinforce* patriarchal sexual roles and relations - one should not discount its significance, particularly in marginal communities like Villa del Mar. On the one hand, it provides women (and men) with a means of resisting those who seek to control and circumscribe their sexuality by forcing them to remain celibate outside of marriage. On the other, it serves as a useful device in explaining why relationships fail, and why the reality of marriage so often does not live up to one's hopes and expectations.

Gender and class differences in romantic discourses

That romanticism is a discourse that does not hold the same appeal for all social groups is implicit within the discussion above. Thus, let us now address these differences in a somewhat more explicit fashion. In the first instance, it is obvious that women are generally far stronger proponents of romantic love than their male counterparts. This is the case for several reasons, not least of which is the fact that it offers them a potent alternative to the misogyny that permeates mainstream gender and religious discourses. In other words, women champion romanticism precisely because it embodies the prospect of a personal relationship that is loving and non-hierarchical, rather than one founded upon deceit, domination and violence.

Of course, the institution of patriarchy ensures that men do not feel the same need or interest to partake of a 'romantic' relationship of this sort. Not only do they derive personal benefit from women's subservience in the context of a marriage or common-law union (eg. through house-keeping, personal and sexual services), but dominant gender constructions are such that men

tend to attach relatively little importance to interpersonal relations in their lives. However, this is not to say that men remain entirely unmoved in the face of romantic discourses. On the one hand, many are attracted by the warmth and emotional support that is inherent within a 'romantic' relationship. On the other, the fact that men have already internalized certain tenets of romanticism as part of their upbringing in a 'macho' cultural context (eg. that they must be willing to fight those who show disrespect for their girl-friend) makes them more likely to look upon it with favour than they otherwise would.

Finally, our research findings show that Villa del Mar youth tend to be considerably more enthusiastic in their support of romantic discourses than their counterparts in Villa del Sol. Needless to say, this is the product of several factors, of which one of the most significant is the dearth of opportunities for socio-economic advancement in this community. Given this state of affairs, local youth see romanticism as the only viable path towards personal fulfilment, a view that stands in sharp contrast to prevailing opinion in Villa del Sol, where young people place far more emphasis upon such issues as psychological compatibility and potential earning power when choosing a suitable mate.

Feminist discourses

Tracing its roots to nineteenth century Europe and North America, feminist discourse became increasingly influential in the decades following the end of the Second World War, when changing social realities prompted a growing number of women to mobilize in an effort to advance their personal, political and reproductive rights. Although the bulk of this activism continues to be centred in First World countries, other regions of the world have benefited as well, with Costa Rica being a notable example.

Without wishing to engage in gross over-simplification, one might nonetheless argue that, for much of its history, feminist ideology has drawn heavily upon liberal political theory, and particularly its concepts of reason and the public-private divide. How so? In the first instance, early feminist thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) sought to make use of the liberal notion

that individuals enjoy certain inalienable rights founded upon their ability to reason, using it as a basis to challenge the palpable *inequality* of women and men in the societies in which they lived.

While this strategy did prove to be successful in a number of important respects, for example in garnering women the right to vote, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that feminists began to make significant gains in women's day-to-day lives. Needless to say, this was an era of rapid welfare state expansion into a growing number of areas that would have previously been considered part of the private sphere (and hence areas into which the state could not legitimately penetrate), and feminists followed hard on the heels of state agents. Their purpose, as in the case of their predecessors in the nineteenth century, was to promote reform by pointing out contradictions between the rhetoric of equality and the reality of continued discrimination, using the courts and the political system as means of challenging the status quo and forcing the pace of change.

However, by the 1970s the limitations inherent within this 'gradualist' approach became increasingly obvious to a growing number of activists within the feminist camp, prompting some to forsake liberal feminism in favour of more radical theorizations of the roots of male domination. For this latter group, the liberal view that sexual equality can be achieved through such vehicles as greater political representation, enhanced educational opportunities and affirmative action in the workplace is essentially flawed, since it fails to take into account the fact that the institutions of society, like mainstream gender constructions themselves, are permeated by the ideology and practice of patriarchy. Thus, according to the radical perspective, women will only achieve true equality once all patriarchal structures (including marriage and obligatory heterosexuality) are fully dismantled.

Feminist discourses by gender and class

Within a Costa Rican context, there can be little doubt that feminism holds considerable appeal for a broad swathe of the country's female population. Thus, we were not surprised to learn that many of the young women whom we interviewed were strongly supportive of key elements

within the feminist agenda, including an end to male violence; freedom to pursue an education or a career; full equality before the law; and an end to men's exploitation of their wives and girlfriends.

However, it should be noted that their support did not extend beyond the tenets of *liberal* feminism; for example, none of the participants was willing to call into question the institution of marriage or basic assumptions regarding women's nurturing role. Why is this the case? While there are undoubtedly any number of forces at work, it is clear that fear of the unknown and an inability to question existing norms feature prominently among the reasons why the feminism of most young women focuses merely upon the elimination of patriarchy's most offensive elements. Thus, as far as female research participants are concerned, the wholesale restructuring of gender roles and relations is simply not on the agenda. As Hilda put it, 'I don't know how the world could be otherwise. I can't even imagine us being different.'

As for the young men who were involved in the study, the majority were opposed to the feminist programme, while at the same time expressing strong support for the status quo. Again, one might argue that this is not particularly surprising; since men derive disproportionate benefit from the existing gender order, what stake do they have in changing it? However, by the same token it must be acknowledged that a significant number of male participants were prepared to make an exception for forms of feminist claims-making that might prove advantageous to them, for example in relation to women's right to an education or to a career.

Of course, it need hardly be added that gender is not the only variable at work in influencing participants' views on feminism; individuals' class background is also relevant in this regard. For example, low self-esteem and high rates of male joblessness in Villa del Mar have contributed to a situation in which men feel particularly threatened by the principles of liberal feminism, and thus are likely to condemn them in especially strong terms. In Villa del Sol by contrast, where men are more upwardly mobile and patriarchal gender discourses tend to be imposed in a less coercive fashion, there appears to be significantly less male resistance to feminist ideology and practice.

XII

Informal Resistance to Discourses

Background

From the outset, one might usefully recall the socio-economic characteristics that distinguish Villa del Mar from Villa del Sol:

In general, Villa del Mar youth who took part in this study hail from low-income social strata, in which absentee fathers and single, working mothers are the norm. Moreover, in the absence of readily accessible intellectual and material resources, young people become 'body-oriented', seeing the latter as the primary means through which to express their gender and sexuality.

Meanwhile, the majority of participants from Villa del Sol were characterized by staunchly middle-class family backgrounds, with professional fathers and stay-at-home mothers. Thus, not only do young people here enjoy a carefree material existence, but they also have access to a high quality education. Needless to say, this in turn leads them to place less emphasis upon innate physical qualities when defining themselves, and more on the acquisition of status symbols, whether money, expensive clothes or a prestigious job.

As we will endeavour to show in the pages that follow, social class (along with gender) is a key determinant of the forms of resistance adopted by young people at any given moment in space or time.

Resistance by young women in Villa del Mar

During the course of interviews and group sessions involving female participants from Villa del Mar, we were continuously struck by the latter's seeming inability to communicate opinions, feelings and abstract ideas, particularly when these touched upon matters of sex. Even among those who had experienced sexual initiation (which typically occurs between the ages of 11 and 13 for girls living in this community), no one was able to describe the physical differences between men and women, or what distinguishes oral from penetrative sex.

How to explain this state of affairs? While it is true that female youth living in Villa del Mar enjoy limited access to social and educational resources, we would argue that young women's apparent lack of sexual knowledge on a cognitive-critical level is in fact indicative of non-verbal resistance to the tenets of hegemonic discourses.

Thus, even though almost all of the female participants launched into their interview by denying any sexual experience whatsoever, many would subsequently confess to a range of sexual practices, including petting, mutual masturbation and fellatio. Indeed, some went so far as to admit that they had participated in group sex games and other forms of play in which the loser would be obliged to give sexual favours or watch pornographic films. However, despite these admissions, participants would continue to deny that they were sexually active, since they had not engaged in vaginal intercourse.

Still, this is not to suggest that young women's resistance to dominant sexual discourses is uni-dimensional. For example, many are also resentful of the heavy emphasis placed upon biology in sex education classes, along with their teachers' lack of honesty and openness in discussing issues related to human sexuality. As one might imagine, this in turn prompts them to disregard information provided in a school setting, and to make use instead of alternative learning channels, including fashion magazines and television soap operas

Day-dreaming is also relevant in this regard, representing a form of resistance whose scope is, in many cases, directly proportional to the degree of repression suffered by individuals at the hands of their parents or other family members. Drawing liberally upon the plots of romantic novels and movies, young women imagine wildly erotic encounters free of guilt and drudgery, along with miraculous solutions to their economic woes and poor employment prospects.

Moreover, one might argue that involvement in evangelical Protestant churches is another means by which Villa del Mar's young women resist the tenets of dominant discourses. Although few could identify with precision the liturgical and dogmatic differences between Roman Catholicism and its Protestant counterparts, it was clear - both from the interviews and through ethnographic observation - that the new churches are especially popular with women.

Why is this the case? In the first instance, it is clear that many dislike the misogynous attitude that permeates all aspects of Catholic worship, and thus have turned to Protestantism because it offers greater scope for female involvement in church activities, including its governance structure. Furthermore, young women also appreciate the firm stance adopted by evangelical churches on male sexual impropriety, seeing it as a powerful counterweight to the double standards inherent within prevailing patriarchal discourses.

Finally, it should be emphasized that, among those whom we interviewed, there was a close correlation between opposition to dominant discourses and identification with more masculines roles and behaviour. Raquel is a case in point. Having been raised in a family of boys, and allowed to play and experiment alongside them, she has grown up to become a young woman who is neither fearful of decision-making nor of openly challenging the restrictions and prohibitions placed upon her as a member of the 'weaker' sex.

Resistance by young men in Villa del Mar

Like their female counterparts, male adolescents in Villa del Mar have adopted a range of strategies in order to make manifest their opposition to the tenets of hegemonic discourses. Certainly the most visible of these is the habit many have adopted of wearing their hair long, piercing and tattooing their bodies, and choosing clothes that highlight their muscles and tanned skin. Needless to say, these fashion statements are meant to underscore young men's disdain for Christian notions of modesty and chastity.

In similar fashion, it is quite common for male adolescents to express their hostility towards the Church and the mainstream values it represents by refusing to go to mass, or by calling into question the moral integrity of priests and other religious officials. Indeed, male youth find few pastimes more entertaining than recounting stories of sexual abuse or impropriety perpetrated by those whom they sarcastically refer to as 'God's representatives on earth'.

As we will endeavour to show in the following section, young men's strategy of focusing upon priests' hyperactive libidos and sordid sexual encounters stands in marked contrast to the approach favoured by their counterparts in Villa del Sol, where it is far more common to use logic as a basis upon which to uncover hypocrisy and contradiction within religious institutions and the individuals who represent them.

Meanwhile, male participants whose fathers have abandoned their families and left their mothers to raise the children single-handedly will often adopt views and opinions that run directly counter to predominant gender discourses. For example, Alberto described his mother as 'both the man and woman' as far as household management is concerned, as well as noting that she is the only breadwinner in the family.

Needless to say, this has made him exceedingly sensitive to others' comments that women are incapable of engaging in anything more strenuous than housework. As he put it, 'what's really unfair is the way women get billed as the weaker sex, as though they were made of glass while men are made of iron.' For Alberto, individuals who subscribe to such a view are ignorant, as are those who treat their wives as 'objects or 'slaves'.

As for matters touching directly upon sex and sexuality, young men in Villa del Mar are no less vocal in their resistance. Thus, with respect to sex education classes in particular, many will endeavour to show their contempt for the course material by laughing and joking continuously, and by poling fun at anyone who appears to be genuinely interested in what the teacher has to say. Indeed, from this perspective it came as no surprise to us when several female interview participants came forward to complain about their male counterparts, suggesting that they were more interested in making a mockery of the process than actually educating themselves in matters touching upon reproductive health and human sexuality.

Of course, it is also common for young men to challenge prevailing sexual mores and values by expressing their sexuality through illegitimate channels, such as premarital intercourse, masturbation, bestiality, homosexuality and group sex. Indeed, particularly interesting in this regard is the notion of 'friends with rights', in essence an unconventional sexual relationship in which neither party makes a commitment to the other. In this way, by turning mainstream views on dating and marriage on their head, young people engage in a form of group resistance to hegemonic discourses that emphasize purity, fidelity and virginity.

Moreover, also pertinent in this regard is the willingness with which young men transgress place- and time-based taboos on sexual activity, for example by engaging in intercourse during daylight hours or in public spaces. To cite but one example, Kenneth reported having friends who go to the beach everyday after school, armed with binoculars so that they might spy on other young couples (whether hetero- or homosexual) who are in the midst of a discrete sexual encounter.

Along similar lines, several male participants indicated that they went out of their way to befriend members of 'deviant' sexual minorities, including female sex trade workers, transvestites, gays and lesbians. Indeed, many also showed themselves to be remarkably willing to defend prostitutes' right to practice their trade, arguing that the Church's condemnation of commercial sex fails to pay adequate heed to the social realities in which many of these women find themselves. As with other practices that run counter to prevailing assumptions and values, participants' objective in voicing such an opinion was to register opposition to sexual mores that circumscribed and limited expressions of their own sexuality.

Finally, one might argue that the numerous young men who indicated to us that they are planning to leave Villa del Mar, either to pursue post-secondary studies or in the hope of finding better paid work in other cities, are also engaging in a form of resistance, whereby dominant community values are self-consciously rejected or called into question. Thus, rather than aspiring to become 'real' men whose masculinity is expressed through their physical prowess or domination of others, these individuals are endeavouring to construct an alternative identity, founded upon such pillars as educational attainment or financial prosperity.

Resistance by young men in Villa del Sol

In light of the stark socio-economic differences that distinguish the two communities from each other, it is not particularly surprising that young men living in Villa del Sol do not challenge dominant discourses in the same way as their counterparts in Villa del Mar. Whereas members of the latter group tend to express resistance through their bodies, the former are far more likely to make use of critical thinking as a means of undermining mainstream values.

Indeed, one might even go so far as to suggest that superior reasoning skills play much the same role as strength and virility in Villa del Mar, communicating to others that one is worthy of respect, while at the same time providing the basis for displays of rebellion and resistance.

In many respects, Santiago is typical in this regard, using logic and reason in a bid to counter the seemingly unstoppable forces that have served to turn his life upside down. The son of recently divorced parents, he lives alone with his mother, who depends on her ex-husband's modest support payments to make ends meet.

Given the acrimonious circumstances that surrounded the break-up, including spousal abuse and sexual infidelity on the part of his father, Santiago is understandably bitter. In short, not

only did he blame his mother for initiating divorce proceedings, but he also began to feel ashamed, dirty and contemptuous of the Christian God that had, in his eyes, failed him. As a way of underscoring his disenchantment, he turned his back on Christianity, focusing his reading instead upon the writings of Charles Darwin, along with the holy texts of any number of Eastern religions.

However, at a certain point his criticism of the Roman Catholic Church became so forceful that his mother, father and teachers began to take notice, punishing him severely for giving voice to such heresies. This in turn prompted him to use 'logic' once again in an attempt to resolve this latest crisis, indicating to us in an interview session that his studies had led him to the realization that 'all scientific evidence points to the Christian Bible's unfailing accuracy,' and that it was God, rather than the man from whose sperm he derives, who is his true father.

In similar fashion, when Aaron was recently faced with his father's death and subsequent community disapproval of his mother for becoming involved with another man, both he and his older brother felt compelled to interrogate convictions and assumptions they had long taken for granted. While it was precisely this latter process that caused his brother to adopt a strict atheist perspective, Aaron himself has become considerably less zealous in his faith, arguing that Christianity must be guided by intelligence, reason and flexibility if it is to remain relevant in the modern era.

Moreover, male participants in Villa del Sol also used critical thinking to expose contradictions in other hegemonic discourses, with Guillermo in particular arguing that sexism is both 'silly' and 'unfair'. As he put it, 'why must only women remain virgin before marriage? If the woman has to, the man should do the same.' However, by the same token it should be noted that the use of logic in resisting dominant models and assumptions is restricted primarily to individuals who are experiencing significant problems in their lives (such as the divorce of their parents); others are more likely to use critical thinking on *behalf* of the status quo, rather than against it.

Resistance by young women in Villa del Sol

THE SEXUAL CONSTRUCTION OF LATIN YOUTH

In important respects, Villa del Sol's young women are similar to its young men. That is to say, they complain of the same communication problems with their parents, and are no less aware of the Church's deep-seated influence over many areas of social life. Moreover, they also tend to be articulate, expressive and self-confident, qualities that distinguish them in no uncertain terms from female adolescents in Villa del Mar.

While one might argue that young women in Villa del Sol challenge the tenets of dominant discourses in a number of significant ways, for example by using critical thinking to expose discursive contradictions (*ie.* in a fashion similar to that of their male counterparts), or by refusing to adopt a 'feminine' appearance (*eg.* short skirt, nail polish and high heels), others, such as Nidia, have gone further in their resistance.

How so? Quite simply, not only does she refuse to conceal the fact that she is an atheist, but her criticism of the elitism, corrupt practices and misogynous outlook of the Roman Catholic hierarchy is at once damning and eloquent:

How can you respect the pope when he carries a diamond-studded cross and proclaims his love of simplicity when he kisses a child in Somalia but doesn't care whether the child has got enough to eat? In addition, why is it that we've never seen a female pope, a black pope, a Latin, Asian or African pope? They've all been white Europeans who've spent their whole life in Rome.

If these charges were not serious enough in themselves, Nidia went on to identify other areas in which she believes the Church to be dangerously out of step with present-day realities. In her view, nowhere is this more evident than in the field of women's rights, which continue to be trampled upon with impunity by a religious hierarchy that appears bent on preserving white male privilege regardless of the cost to anyone else.

Moreover, even though she often feels intense shame when she looks at herself in a mirror, she is open with her feelings and frank when discussing her sexuality. Needless to say, this is an important point, for it underscores the degree to which Nidia is attempting to fashion for herself a sexual identity that is based upon honesty and self-awareness, rather than guilt and self-hatred. Let us hope that more young people follow in Nidia's footsteps.

XIII

Sexual Culture and Alternative Approaches to AIDS Prevention

The monolithic and self-perpetuating character of hegemonic discourses is such that religious dictates, along with gender roles and sexual orientation, are widely understood to be non-negotiable absolutes. However, in examining processes involved in the development of gender identities and sexual orientation among adolescents, recognizing *how* discourses have constructed rules, norms, explanations, expectations and sexual practices has served to illustrate the differences present in hegemonic discourses and, in so doing, has challenged the indissoluble nature of “sexuality”. However, rather than overtly resisting and rewriting the discourses on sexuality, young people frequently adopt what we have termed *co-existence behavior* (i.e. they engage in conflict-resolution strategies that do not address the root of the problem).

In Costa Rica, *co-existence behavior* has taken on a number of different forms in its hidden resistance to sexual discourses, in the process contributing to the difficulties inherent in AIDS prevention work among the country's adolescent population. Manifesting itself in censorship, internal watchdog mechanisms, compartmentalization, magical-religious thought, sexual and economic violence and escape mechanisms, this type of behavior seeks to redress contradictions among the dominant discourses, yet in the end only provides temporary solutions to long-term problems.

Barriers to AIDS prevention

Censorship

Having defined it as an attempt to hinder the free flow of information as a means either of limiting resistance to dominant discourses, or of preventing the emergence of alternative ones, censorship is clearly one of the key barriers in the way of an effective AIDS prevention strategy in Costa Rica. Spearheaded by the Roman Catholic Church, in association with particular elements within the media and public at large, there has been a concerted attempt to censor material dealing with pre-marital sex and AIDS-related topics by staunchly opposing any moves to include the latter on the sex education curricula of the public school system. However, while this censoring may prevent an attack on dominant sexual values and mores, it also silences debate on alternatives open to young people who are sexually active or who have questions concerning their sexuality.

Interestingly, this attempt to stifle potential resistance to the dominant religious paradigm has not been extended to the romantic or gendered constructions of sexuality. Rather, the popularity (and availability) of romantic novels, films and pornography has if anything increased, perhaps because these discourses do not pose a threat to dominant modes of thought, as the messages they disseminate serve to reinforce the religious understanding of sexuality.

Nonetheless, for as long as the dominant ideology remains unquestioned, and sex education remains unavailable, young people will continue to fall prey to unwanted pregnancies and HIV infection in this country. As it stands, they are internalizing a set of values which lead them to believe that active penetration is superior to passive penetration, and that God does not punish good Christians. Of course, once such views have been assimilated, one can hardly expect adolescents to be in a position to make the choices that will allow them to lead healthy, fulfilling sexual lives.

Internal watchdog

Discipline is another means of silencing resistance and contradictions. Through this process, young people learn to police their own behavior, and thus do not have to rely on external forces to keep them 'in line'. In this way, whenever individuals engage in an activity that, upon reflection, falls beyond the bounds of respectability, their 'internal watchdog' is invoked, inducing feelings of guilt and suppressing memories of the offending act. Examples of such behavior include childhood sexual games, along with instances of homosexual contact with friends and companions of the same sex.

However, forgetting is not the only mechanism employed to protect oneself from the consequences of sexual transgression. Denial is also used in this regard, most notably by *cacheros* who have sexual relations with other men yet do not consider themselves gay. Of course, among the consequences of these 'internal watchdog' mechanisms is the tendency to downplay (or deny altogether) the risks associated with unsafe sex and, at a more general level, to fail to learn from one's sexual experiences. All too often, young people, having 'discovered' sexual urges within themselves, attempt to satiate these desires without having the slightest consciousness of AIDS prevention strategies or family planning methods.

Thus, instead of giving youth the tools with which to take responsibility for their actions, hegemonic forces attempt to control the latter's bodies through fear, guilt, disgust and shame. In this way, the Church, by condemning all expressions of sexuality that are not directly related to procreation, has made young people ashamed of their sex organs, and feel disgust at any 'illegitimate' sexual act, be it masturbation, cunnilingus, petting or kissing. Moreover, as the interviews and group sessions have shown, this shame is also felt when individuals go to the store to buy condoms and other birth control devices. As one might imagine, this is largely because the latter are associated either with homosexual or non-procreative sex, thereby invoking guilt and fear of punishment among the young people involved.

Magic-religious thought

In many cases, the proponents of hegemonic discourses attempt to erase contradictions by demanding that individuals engage in *autos da fé*, in other words that they accept discursive premises on the basis of faith alone. Mary's immaculate conception and Christ's resurrection provide obvious instances of Christianity's magic-religious orientation. In effect, these attitudes invoke supernatural explanations for natural events, 'resolving' contradictions and tensions by placing them outside of the human realm and in that of magic-religious thought.

While every society has been influenced to some extent by its magic-religious belief system, in Costa Rica this discourse is still overwhelmingly dominant despite the existence of substantial antagonism and contradiction *vis à vis* other discourses. Should confirmation of this claim be

required, one need only consider the fact that Costa Ricans, particularly those who are fundamentalist, widely assume that supernatural forces influence most facets of their lives. Even those who are not devout share these views, and thus it should come as no surprise that many young people believe that gods and devils are intimately involved in their decisions to have intercourse, engage in sexual violence, use condoms, watch pornography, or have multiple partners.

Of course, in adhering to such a belief system, individuals are absolved of personal responsibility for their actions. When a 'mistake' is made or the bounds of 'legitimate' behavior transgressed, the perpetrator can excuse him or herself by arguing that a supernatural being had influenced, or even made, the decision to act in a particular way. As such, if a person has sex with while in love, he or she can claim that the hand of a god lay behind this action, and thus explanations need not be sought. Similarly, in the event of rape or sexual abuse, individuals will often attempt to justify their actions by claiming that they had been swayed by the Devil. While, this is not to suggest that there is no room for autonomous decision-making, young people quickly learn that this is neither the only nor necessarily the best way to justify oneself.

With respect to personal relationships in particular, adolescents have internalized the belief that 'scientific thinking' is inappropriate for people who are in love, lest they be considered unromantic or insincere. In this way, young people are often convinced by the argument that partners should be chosen on the basis of physical attraction alone (*ie.* Cupid's arrow), and not because of intellectual or personal compatibility. Needless to say, such a perspective does not lend itself to frank discussion concerning the causes of AIDS and prevention strategies, since sexual intercourse is perceived to be a 'magical' space of gods and demons untouched by rational thought or common sense.

Compartmentalization

Young people also attempt to address conflicts and discrepancies in sexual discourses through a process of compartmentalization. What does this mean? Quite simply, rather than rejecting contradictory behaviors and values out of hand, they are placed in separate mental categories, where they co-exist in segregation from one another. In this way, behavior becomes dependent upon the company or situation in which one finds oneself, with individuals losing awareness of the contradictory nature of their actions.

In Costa Rican society, the roots of compartmentalization are three-fold: religion, family and historical background. In the first instance, religion encourages such behavior by demanding unswerving obedience to its precepts, leaving no space for the articulation of alternative positions or perspectives. Unorthodox ways of thinking or acting are silenced so as to avoid the risk of condemnation or punishment. Secondly, the structure of the Costa Rican family also reinforces compartmentalization through the central role it plays in young people's lives. In short, not only is it assumed that youth will live at home until married, but also that they will rely on their parents to find gainful employment. Thus, loyalty to family values is considered vital, and young people are expected to live for their families as well as themselves. Finally, the country's historical legacy is such that it was relegated to the periphery of the Spanish empire, which meant that social control mechanisms were relatively lax, leaving people free to engage in actions (eg. sex outside of marriage) that would not have been tolerated in the larger colonial centres of Mexico or Peru.

On account of this, the population has learned to live with stark contrasts between the norms expected of them on the one hand, and the reality of their day-to-day lives on the other. Costa Ricans' sexual practices confirm this view. For example, in 1995 more than 40 percent of all births took place outside of wedlock, thereby revealing monogamous marriage to be nothing more than a 'museum piece' that is admired from afar, yet rarely seen in practice (Barth 1988, p.121).

Moreover, as the number and intensity of contradictory ideas increase, so too does compartmentalization. Consequently, Costa Ricans have inherited two antagonistic and opposing currents of thought, namely asceticism and machismo. On the one hand, they have been taught that sex is a means for men to demonstrate their manliness and, on the other, a cardinal sin. However, these different spheres of life are 'disconnected' from one another by compartmentalization. That is to say, within each person the boundaries between different ideas, beliefs and behavior become reified, resulting in a situation whereby the 'religious' sphere is disconnected from 'scientific' thought; the emotional sphere is disconnected from reason (since love and reason are deemed incompatible); sexuality is separated from religion (as the latter is seen as entirely hostile towards the former); and finally, among men in particular, gender is removed from the romantic realm (since men must reject machismo's contempt for women if they are to establish a loving relationship with one).

Given this outlook, it is not surprising that young people's sexual culture is also compartmentalized. In short, even as their parents talk to them about the importance of virginity and fidelity, they look around them and see a world rife with adultery and sexual precociousness. Religious dictates are championed yet often go unfulfilled. To cope with these apparent dichotomies, adolescents have divided their environment in ways that correspond to their own mental categories. For example, bars are seen as spaces where desire and sexuality can be openly expressed. Church, meanwhile, is a place for pious behaviour, just as school is for studiousness and rational thought.

In this way, young people's compartmentalized communities correspond with their compartmentalized minds, engendering what are often radical changes in personality as they move from one locale to another. Thus, girls who are reserved and passive in Church may very well become assertive and aggressive when they are at the beach with friends. Similarly, young men who are models of good behavior at home become gang leaders or sexual predators when on the street.

That negative consequences should arise from this dichotomization of space and behaviour should be obvious. In matters of AIDS awareness in particular, young people are unlikely to benefit from education and prevention initiatives if they do not perceive there to be a link between the context in which they receive the information (*ie.* school or Church) and the context where it could actually prove useful (*ie.* in a brothel or at a party).

Sexual violence

The social construction of gender has profound implications for the nature of social relations among men and women, with violence being merely one of the ways in which individuals (usually men) cope with latent tensions and contradictions within the latter. In particular, it is used to prevent or punish behavior that calls into question patriarchal relations of power.

For Costa Rican youth, this violence has become a means of controlling and asserting ownership over women's bodies. The means through which this control is exercised vary; though in many case the violence is extreme. For example, the day after we conducted an interview with one young woman, she was raped by her boyfriend. As the school's guidance

counselor made clear to us in meetings afterwards, instances of rape and non-consensual sex are all too common among the female student body.

Moreover, not only was rape reported, but so too was sexual abuse and incest, with one participant in particular admitting to having been raped and assaulted by her own father. Others stated that they had suffered a similar fate. Meanwhile, several of the young men who took part in the study indicated that they often used intimidation, deceit and alcohol as ways of coercing a woman into having sex with them. When these acts of sexual violence are considered alongside the physical violence that young women experience at the hands of their fathers, brothers and boyfriends, it should come as no surprise that most have learned to manipulate their bodies and desires in ways that are pleasing to men (for example through make-up or tight-fitting clothes).

In the face of this oppression, women often display symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, a learned hopelessness that makes them incapable of responding to new crises. Thus, women may become progressively more vulnerable to male aggression because of the extent to which previous trauma has eroded their capacity to halt abuse.

However, despite the level of violence, it should be noted that the gender system imposes certain costs upon its beneficiaries as well. For example, the association of alcohol with masculinity makes young men drink excessively, indeed so much so that one community leader in Villa del Mar commented that the community's men have become 'sub-male', given the degree to which machismo has made drunkenness and the *dole* a way of life. Moreover, this self-destructive orientation is also apparent in men's tendency to spurn bodily care or preventative health measures for fear of appearing effeminate and weak. Of course, it need hardly be added in this regard that a culture which treats half its population as objects and the other half as conquering giants will have difficulty in promoting ideas around AIDS awareness and prevention.

Economic violence

While Costa Rica's dominant discourses purport to be democratic, offering everyone equal access to their bounty so long as they adhere to certain fundamental principles, in fact they

reflect the narrow interests of the country's upper and middle classes. However, despite this inequity in the distribution of resources, members of marginalized communities like Villa del Mar have been co-opted into accepting the tenets of hegemonic discourses, and in many cases have even become their most staunch defenders.

How so? On the one hand, many of the individuals whose lives have been torn apart by the effects of joblessness, violence, substance abuse and family break-up have been drawn to the redemptive power of Christianity. Thus, whether or not the Church is actually able to deliver on all of its promises, at least it offers the possibility of salvation, something which is very appealing to those who are faced with so many problems. However, as we have argued above, not only is the Church leadership opposed to birth control and premarital sex, but it has resisted strongly any attempts to discuss these issues in a serious manner.

On the other hand, gender discourses have also been influential in this regard, particularly in poor communities where they are learned and reinforced on the street. That is to say, not only are women given fewer opportunities to become self-sufficient by their parents (eg. in terms of education or a vocation), but the dominant gender system is such that their earning power is far less than that of men in any case. Of course, these obstacles contribute in turn to a situation in which women lack the resources to empower themselves, and thus have little choice but to engage in activities which serve to perpetuate the existing gender order.

Escapism and unrealistic solutions

Escapism is yet another means by which young people attempt to deal with the proliferation of conflicting discourses. Substance abuse, music and dancing are all examples of escapist activities. However, not only do they risk becoming addictive, but many are co-factors in HIV infections as well.

Although there are many reasons why young people might abuse drugs or alcohol, a number of issues stand out as particularly significant in this regard. In the first instance, they provide a useful means of overcoming inhibitions, allowing men to express emotions normally considered 'feminine', and women to become more aggressive and assertive (a finding noted by the project

ethnographer following visits to the countryside outside of Villa del Mar). Of course, drugs and alcohol also offer young people a way of escaping from problems of everyday life, whether these involve contradictory messages sent to them by their parents, the effects of divorce, or grinding physical and sexual abuse.

Toward an alternative model for prevention

At present, the dominant health promotion discourse in Costa Rica is that of the bio-medical model. Within this paradigm, experts seek to prevent disease by devising education and information campaigns based upon the most recent technological advances. Moreover, this is the model that has been used by Costa Rican state actors in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Without wishing to suggest that all segments of the health promotion community, let alone all segments of society at large, support its underlying premises, it is nonetheless possible to summarize them as follows:

5. STDs, AIDS and teenage pregnancies are the result of inadequate information, poverty, family breakdown and, most important of all, inappropriate health care services. Young people make mistakes simply because they lack a basic understanding of family planning methods and safe sexual practices.
6. Given sufficient information, young people can learn to protect themselves. Since reproductive health is an integral part of medicine, doctors, nurses and social workers must be made partners in sex education.
7. The target population for reproductive health programs should be 'adolescents', in other words young people between the ages of 12 and 18.
8. The proper vehicle for reproductive health education is the state.

Have these hypotheses and policies produced the desired results? We believe that the findings of our study, outlined in previous chapters, have adequately answered this question.

Quite simply, our research has shown that reproductive health education *per se* does not necessarily contribute to young people's health because there is no attempt to grapple with the larger socio-cultural context. That is to say, despite the fact that 80 percent of the country's population in 1990 reported knowing how to protect itself from HIV infection, only 25 percent of sexually active males and 16 percent of sexually active females made regular use of condoms (Madrigal and Schifter 1990). Thus, the problem is not so much a lack of scientific information, but rather the social relations and structures which serve to perpetuate high risk behavior on the part of youth.

As such, the 'rational choice' which health experts have promoted (*ie.* have sex only when married) is not necessarily appropriate in light of the social realities faced by the bulk of Costa Rica's adolescent population. For example, if one considers the conditions under which young women in Villa del Mar live, one will soon realize that interventions designed simply to encourage sexual abstinence are deeply flawed. Why is the case? In short, for these women, pregnancy offers them the hope of establishing a bond with a man, who will then take them away from an oppressive existence in their parents' home. Having no job prospects in any case, they have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Furthermore, we already know that the years six to 12 are critical in a child's sexual development. It is a time when gender differences become pronounced, and adulthood beckons for many living in poor communities throughout the Third World. Thus, for these individuals, the concept of adolescence means little, and is seen merely as a middle class luxury to be enjoyed by youth who need not get married at an early age or work to support their families. As such, we believe it is critical that sex education be provided at an earlier age than is currently the case, so as to maximize AIDS awareness among what is already a vulnerable segment of the population.

Furthermore, after analyzing the content of sex education classes as they are now provided in Costa Rican schools, we would argue that the latter reinforces existing gender stereotypes. In short, while girls tend to be provided with more information on pregnancy, boys receive more detailed information on sexually-transmitted diseases. In this way, the 'scientific' discourses of reproductive health promote sexism by placing the responsibility for pregnancy on women and STD control on men. Moreover,

further exacerbating this sexism is the fact the sex education teachers tend to pay more attention to boys in class, and answer their questions ahead of those of girls.

To summarize, one might argue that the single-minded use of a bio-medical approach in sex education has not served the cause of AIDS prevention particularly well, for a number of reasons. Firstly, its emphasis upon biology to the exclusion of emotions and pleasure serves to make young people skeptical of the messages received, since they do not believe the course is dealing with the subject in an honest fashion. Additionally, the approach reinforces gender biases while ignoring the degree of variability in students' socio-economic background, both of which conspire in turn to alienate youth, and to make them that much more likely to compartmentalize their thoughts and actions in ways that place them at heightened risk of HIV infection.

Discourse analysis as prevention

The in-depth interviews we carried out in Villa del Mar and Villa del Sol affected the young participants in ways that we had not anticipated. Foremost in this regard was the fact that young people became sensitized to the contradictory nature of the messages they were receiving, and that these messages influenced their behaviour. In gaining awareness in this way, they reported to us that they felt in greater control of their lives. This result came as a surprise to us because our interviewees had only asked questions; no advice or counsel was given.

Based on these responses, we decided that our proposed model for AIDS prevention should have youth empowerment as its primary objective. As a means of accomplishing this goal, young people will be asked to analyze prevailing sexual discourses and cultures themselves, focusing on the latter's contradictions and the forms of resistance these engender.

Moreover, by placing youth at the forefront of the discussion, the programme's content will focus on AIDS-related issues in terms that are relevant and meaningful to the participants involved, with prospective topics including internal and external censorship, compartmentalization, magic-religious thought, and economic and physical violence. We believe that the principal problem currently facing young people is not so much the contradictory nature of dominant discourses, but rather the lack of

freedom to question them. As such, our approach to AIDS prevention will seek to inculcate critical thinking in areas touching upon sex and sexuality.

Moreover, our findings have also led us to identify the following recommendations:

1. Make prevention culture-specific

Strategy: Different messages, different interventions

That messages around issues of sexuality are contradictory is generally acknowledged. Responsibility for this state of confusion is deemed to lie either with the media, for disseminating suggestive or pornographic messages, or the Church, for its refusal to countenance a pragmatic approach towards family planning and STD prevention. According to Lilian, owner of Villa del Mar's pool hall, youth are confused "because at school they talk to them about sex, but without spirituality ... they are only told about condoms and the pill." On the other hand, Gerber, the school counselor, maintains that the Catholic Church is responsible for not giving young people the necessary information on condoms and family planning methods. Moreover, on those occasions when he has broached the topic of birth control, parents petition the Church to have him silenced. However, despite their disagreements, both Lilian and Gerber believe that discourses on sexuality should speak with one voice. As Lilian put it, "the family, the school, the press, television ... we all should be able to agree on one view and give only one message."

Of course, state-sponsored AIDS education campaigns did attempt to unify the discourses by adopting a position that incorporated the Church's ideals of fidelity and abstinence before marriage, yet encouraged condom use should young people decide to become sexually active. The entire country dreamed of an all-embracing discourse that would put an end to contradiction and diversity. As such, each subsequent prevention campaign has sought to achieve consensus on the central message to be disseminated. In cases where consensus could not be reached, some other message would have to be found that would allow the parties involved to paper over their differences, even at the cost of reinforcing the view that theory and practice are two very different things.

Yet, at the same time that the country's elites were engaged in debate over the content of prevention programmes, young people have continued to have unsafe sex. Generally speaking, the age of initiation is 16 years for boys and a little older for girls; this pattern has not changed substantially over the past forty years. This fact, in combination with the responses of research participants themselves, has led us to propose a new model for prevention, which, rather than identifying a single unifying message, endeavours to incorporate inconsistency and contradiction. After all, why only have one prevention discourse when there are any number of sexual discourses in circulation, each with its own rules and values?

Among the discourses we have identified in this study are those of gender, class, sexual orientation religion and culture. For example, while homophobia is common among Costa Rican youth, rejection of homosexuality varies according to each group's understanding of sexual orientation. In one case, it may be rejected for reasons related to gender and in another because of pathological concepts associated with homosexuality. Moreover, any number of other factors are also relevant in this regard, such as social status, wealth, education and the role of institutions in the day-to-day lives of community members.

As one might imagine, the observations made above only serve to underscore the view that, if prevention initiatives are to be effective, differences in gender, class and sexual culture (*inter alia*) must be addressed. In short, each community must have a prevention programme that is cognizant of its particular needs and resources.

Meanwhile, all programmes (including those channeled through the mass media) should include messages on tolerance and respect for women and minority groups. Moreover, sexual minorities in particular must be targeted in all prevention efforts, for only in this way will we be able to counteract the discrimination and lack of support that these communities have traditionally faced.

Some examples of ineffective campaigns:

From the information we have gathered in our study, we are able to identify which intervention techniques are likely to fail in the targeted communities, and why.

(a) Messages targeting young women to use condoms:

A recent mass media campaign orchestrated by the Ministry of Health showed young women with condoms in their purses. However, in both of the communities where we undertook our research, sexually assertive young women are thought of as prostitutes; and thus it is unlikely that any of the young women we interviewed would identify with these role models.

(b) Workshops for men who have sex with men

A gay organization based in San José decided to undertake an initiative in Villa del Mar that sought to promote AIDS prevention among men who have sex with other men. Prior to their first meeting, they invited members from a number of groups to attend, including transvestites and *cacheros*. However, few people showed up, and none of these was a *cachero*. How to explain this outcome? Quite simply, it was the product of contrasting perspectives on sexual identity, which leads many men in Villa del Mar who engage in sex with other men to refuse to identify with the gay community at large.

(c) Interventions to involve fathers in sex education at home

The National AIDS Commission has asked fathers to become more involved in their children's sex education. However, in both Villa del Mar and Villa del Sol it was common for young girls to experience sexual abuse and violence at the hands of male siblings, fathers, step-fathers and other male relatives. In these circumstances, it is highly unlikely that young women would be responsive to sex-related information provided to them in this way.

2. Empowering young people to make their own decisions must be a priority

Having empowerment as a key objective in the development of prevention programmes came about as a result of the in-depth interviews we conducted with young people in Villa del Mar and Villa del Sol. During the course of these interviews, it became evident to us that participating youth were undergoing a change in attitude. However, the latter was not due to conscious intervention on the part of the interviewers; rather, it arose because the line of questioning pursued made young people reflect upon their own assumptions about sex, sexuality and dominant discourses. By the end of the last interview, it was obvious that most participants had re-thought many of their views, as the sessions had given them the chance to analyze their lives and the choices they had made, all the while showing them that they had the power to initiate change.

Ensure that interventions are appropriate for the target population

The bio-medical approach to sex education ignores the importance of such variables as gender, class, education, age and sexual orientation. The consequences of this oversight are particularly evident when one considers the issue of gender. In short, not only does the approach fail to recognize the degree to which young people are reluctant to discuss their sexual concerns in the presence of members of the opposite sex, but it pays scant regard to the tendency among young men to ridicule and make fun of their female counterparts in sex education classes, silencing them in the process.

Include sex education programmes in both primary and secondary school

The inclusion of sex education in the school curriculum is an issue that is steeped in controversy, largely on account of the opposition voiced by the Catholic Church. However, rather than engaging with this debate directly, we have sought to show that the latter's inclusion will not necessarily lead to fallen morals, and may very well contribute to young people's ability to think critically.

Indeed, there are those who might argue that the sex education controversy has less to do with the Church's views on birth control, and rather more with what it perceives to be a threat to its hegemonic position in Costa Rica. Having enjoyed a longstanding monopoly over the distribution of sex education materials, perhaps it is afraid that, by giving up this privilege, it

would lose its power to mould young minds and, in so doing, provide the latter with the opportunity to make their own informed decisions on matters touching upon sex and sexuality.

Needless to say, this in turn would provide the basis for critical thinking by young people on any number of fronts, and as such facilitate the unification of all those mental compartments created by individuals' 'internal watchdog' in the face of seemingly irreconcilable contradictions.

Do not fall into the 'condom trap': Help young people use critical thinking

The study of discourses plays a crucial role in the development of critical thinking. In cases where critical thinking is not encouraged, one is placed at risk of falling into the 'condom trap'. This term is used to describe prescriptive condom promotion campaigns, which fail to offer target audiences any reason *why* their use is being advocated. However, when young people are encouraged to think critically, they are then able to make sense of the interplay of discourses in their everyday lives, and call into question the assumptions built into dominant social categories (eg. man/woman, gay/straight).

Initiate interventions at an early age

The age at which sex education should begin is a topic that has aroused considerable debate in the past. However, even as we recognize that an early start-date would arouse considerable opposition from some quarters, we believe it is critical that sex education be made available to children at the primary level, given the extent to which the latter have already begun to experiment sexually with one another. Moreover, we also maintain that a course grounded in discourse analysis would be more beneficial and far less controversial than one steeped in the bio-medical perspective. Issues that could be addressed through such an approach include drugs, violence, gender roles and relations, all of which are co-factors in HIV infection.

Give priority to gender

By focusing on the social construction of gender in sex education programmes, we believe that young people would be better able to question and challenge supposedly immutable assumptions. For example, if boys were given the tools with which to 'de-construct' patriarchal gender categories, they would then be in a position to reflect upon much of what they hear and see around them. In particular, they would become aware that manliness, far from being the work of hormones or a divine plan, is in fact historically- and culturally-specific. Having been sensitized in this way, they would likely develop more respect for women, and feel less pressure to abuse them. Meanwhile, if girls took part in such a programme, they too would be able to call into question the messages and stereotypes that have turned them into second class citizens. Needless to say, empowerment at this level would do more to help women avoid HIV infection than any condom campaign ever could.

Include young people in health promotion

Young people have an important role to play in restructuring dominant sexual discourses, despite the fact that they are often portrayed as passive, empty vessels to be filled with information as the need arises. Given that our research has shown that youth resist the internalization of dominant discourses through such strategies as forgetting or overlooking what is required of them, we would argue that peer education is a preferable approach in matters touching upon sex and sexuality. Young people can work on hot-lines, facilitate workshops, provide peer counseling (under supervision), act in plays, contribute articles to magazines and, in fact, do as much as any health promotion worker with potentially greater impact.

3. Interventions should draw upon positive elements within discourses and sexual culture

There are at present serious obstacles in the way of AIDS prevention in the communities studied, with the proliferation of contradictory messages being merely one of them. Even so, it would be unrealistic to imagine that we could create a new sexual culture or eliminate existing contradictions. What we propose instead is the development of an approach that actively engages with the contradictions and complexities inherent within existing discourses. In particular, this approach will seek to encourage creativity, unmask the 'forbidden' and promote institutional strengthening.

Be creative

In the past, religious sexual discourses have been quite influential in AIDS prevention programmes, particularly those undertaken by the AIDS Department of the Ministry of Health. That is to say, despite its adherence to a bio-medical approach, the Ministry promoted the ideal of chastity before marriage and condom use for 'those who cannot comply.' Of course, the subtext within this message is that those who 'cannot comply' are sinners, a view that study participants rejected (and which caused them to reject the campaign's message *in toto*).

Thus, if one wishes to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS, it makes little sense to address the chaste, since they run little risk of becoming infected in any case. What *is* needed, by contrast, is a programme that targets those who are sexually active and incorporates non-conventional objectives, such as 'eroticizing' the condom or 'romanticizing'" non-penetrative sex.

Do not compartmentalize prevention: target forbidden territories

In general, young people do not associate hospitals, health clinics, schools, churches and the home with sex, but rather with discipline and repression. However, these are the places health promoters often choose to carry out their interventions. Thus, if one wished to enhance the effectiveness of sex education programmes, one would do well to target those locales where young people feel most at ease, such as bars, discotheques, beaches, parks, youth festivals, carnivals and private parties.

4. Widen the scope of AIDS prevention so that it is included in other programmes

Unlike other serious infectious diseases, such as malaria or cholera, AIDS' close association with sex and sexuality ensures that it arouses deep-seated concerns among young people. Given this, it is imperative that prevention initiatives be broad-based, and not narrowly focused in the hands of one professional association or government agency.

Moreover, one must acknowledge the fact that AIDS may not necessarily be young people's primary concern, particularly if they live in a community traumatized by prostitution, poverty or violence. For example, women who are victims of rape or sexual abuse are unlikely to be interested in hearing a lecture about sexual responsibility. In such cases, other issues need to be addressed before AIDS prevention classes can begin. Thus, what is required in this context is, first, the incorporation of sexual openness into all areas of life and second, the adaption of other successful approaches to AIDS prevention into existing programmes.

Recommended actions

To strengthen the institutional capacities of both private and public agencies that work in the area of reproductive health and sex education or in programmes targeting young people. This can be achieved by providing relevant agencies with tools developed through different models, facilitating training and information exchanges, and promoting increased inter-organizational coordination through UNAIDS.

Traditionally, AIDS prevention has been ghettoized in stand-alone programmes, as both public and private health agencies have not wanted to become associated with the disease. However, there are many governmental and non-governmental institutions which work with youth that should be involved in AIDS prevention in order to break the silence surrounding HIV/AIDS.

To develop materials and organize activities and high level meetings with the Ministry of Health, the Social Security Office, the Ministry of Education, non-governmental organizations, private enterprise and religious sectors; in coordination with the aforementioned groups, to promote a policy on sex education that is grounded in the empowerment of young people; and finally, to encourage young people to analyze sex-related messages and make informed decisions.

While our study has been focused principally upon the impact of sexual discourses at the local level, we have also sought to highlight the role of institutions in influencing sexual culture at the

macro level. Key among these institutions has been the Church, which promotes particular sexual mores among Costa Rican youth. Other actors, including government agencies, have also had an impact in this regard. For example, the Ministry of Housing influences sexual culture and practice through its design of low-income dwelling units. The size of the dwelling, the number of rooms, the use of public space and the availability of services all have a role to play. Moreover, it should be noted that these discourses have also changed over time, as what was built forty years ago as low-income housing with several rooms and a garden, is now an austere two-bedroom apartment with no privacy. This is but one move on the part of the state to attempt to control the size of Costa Rican families. As such, AIDS prevention must not rely solely upon these institutions, but rather must adopt an integrated approach, involving all concerned, in order to foster an attitudinal change at the societal level.

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