

Creating Sexuality: Female Same-sex Subjectivities in Mexico City

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Abstract

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Anahi Russo Garrido

This thesis explores the subjectivities of females practicing same-sex sexuality in Mexico City. These subjectivities are here viewed in relationship to recent economic transformations in Mexico and to ideas on gender and sexuality produced by diverse actors such as the gay and lesbian and feminist movements, government programs, the media, and the Catholic Church. While the individual subject is constructed through different dominant ideas, female same-sex sexuality in Mexico, offers an interesting case because most dominant ideas suggest that it cannot exist. Analyzing dominant ideas is, then, not sufficient to understand how subjectivities are constructed. Hegemonic ideas are pieced together to form subjectivities, but meanings on gender and sexuality are also produced by subjects that are here viewed as possessing a creative potential. Subversive ideas are not only considered reactive responses to hegemonic ideals but rather as an active shaping of life to make the everyday experience possible. The presentation of subjectivities here focuses on three main themes: Gender and sexual self-representation; love and sexuality; and, life with the family. The second part of the thesis presents three testimonies that have the potential of challenging fixed definitions of these women's identities and realities. This thesis contributes to the understanding of gender and sexuality in Mexico City from the unexplored location of female same-sex sexuality, and to the understanding of the effects on sexualities and subjectivities of the social and economic changes that have taken place in Mexico during the past decades.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The day before leaving Mexico City I was sitting at Reinas, a lesbian cafe, with Martha, Astrid, Yadelí and Alex. I still have a clear memory of this last afternoon of December 2001. We sipped our cappuccinos and laughed at how I had first intended to come for four months to conduct research on female same-sex sexuality in Mexico City, but ended up staying for over a year and a half. During that time, the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) had been defeated after 70 years of ruling over Mexico, the 23rd and 24th annual parades of Diversidad sexual (sexual diversity) had taken place, Martha and her friends had coordinated the first and second edition of the festival "De los jóvenes de la diversidad sexual", Yadelí and Astrid had begun dating, Alex had found and quit four low paying jobs in a row and I had become a dual citizen by acquiring a Mexican passport. As the sun was going down behind the mountains surrounding the city, we made plans to see each other soon and promised to write.

This scene, taking place in a lesbian cafe and not a kitchen, might seem at odds with many stereotyped representations of Mexican women. While an increasing amount of research in anthropology has been exploring gender and sexuality in Mexico and Latin America, the theme of female same-sex sexuality, however, has remain silenced. This situation reflects (traditional) dominant ideas that conceive males as the active agents in sexual desire, while women are expected to remain passive. However, as female same-sex sexuality in Mexico City is not fiction but the embodied experience of many, traditional dominant ideas do not represent the totality of how gender and sexuality are viewed, experienced and practiced in Mexico City. This research intends, then, to explore

a concealed face of gender and sexuality in Mexico City through the voices of females involved in same-sex sexuality. More precisely, I ask: *How are the subjectivities of females practicing same-sex sexuality positioned in relation to dominant ideas on gender and sexuality in Mexico City? And what do these subjectivities tell us about the workings of gender and sexuality in Mexico City?*

Listening to the voices of females practicing same-sex sexuality is important. First, because the exploration of these subjectivities challenges the supposed non-existence of such practices and life styles in Mexico City, as previous anthropological research has suggested. In previous decades, women have often been represented as dominated by men, submissive and self-sacrificing. These single faceted representations have recently been confronted, by privileging a gender and development approach emphasizing socioeconomic aspects of the lives of women. While these aspects are important, research on body politics remains largely ignored. The continuous presentation of socioeconomic aspects, paints a uniform portrait of women living in the South (in so called third world countries). Blackwood and Wieringa (1999:14) point out that "by ignoring issues of sexuality, they (researchers) imply these issues are not relevant to the South. Northern women have body politics, Southern women have 'gender and development'. Whenever issues of sexuality are studied in the South, they often concern fertility. As Mohanty (1991:6) notes "fertility is the most studied aspect of women's lives in the third world. This particular fact speaks volumes about predominant representations of third world women in social-scientific knowledge production." Such distinct approaches increase the gap between the North and the South. As this research will illustrate, body politics are of importance for many women in Mexico City.

Listening to these unheard voices can also reveal the blind spots of dominant ideas on gender and sexuality, as studies on male same-sex sexuality (see Taylor 1986, Carrier 1995, Prieur, 1998), for example, underlined the importance of activity and passivity in sexualities in Mexico. In choosing a point of view that has not been explored in Mexico, new ways of looking at gender and sexuality dynamics might be unveiled in the process.

In this thesis, the voices of females practicing same-sex sexuality are mainly presented through interview extracts, conversations and information gathered in participant observation. Research consultants are females identifying as women and aged between 19 and 30 years old. Unlike their mothers and grandmothers, they have grown up in a context where Catholic ideals on gender and sexuality are not the only ones available in the city.

One of the important themes of this thesis is certainly that of social change. As Weston (1998:4) puts it: "A person cannot 'just' study sexuality, because sexuality is never separate from history, 'class', 'race', or a host of other social relations." A close look at the various ideas on gender and sexuality circulating in Mexico City will reveal that traditional ideas embodied by the macho and the submissive woman are not the only ones available today. These ideas might be located at a favorable position within power, but they coexist in the ideational landscape alongside other ideas. It is only in the past decades that the feminist and the gay and lesbian movements, governmental programs, the mass-media industry, right wing groups and the Catholic church have been producing/competing over meanings attached to gender and sexuality in Mexico

(Amuchástegui, 2001). Important economic changes have, as well, greatly affected the experience of gender and sexuality. In chapter 3, I give an overview of ideas produced by these institutions, as their arrival has greatly affected the ways in which meanings of female same-sex sexuality are to be understood. Subjectivities are here viewed as positioned and constructed at the crossroads of this multiplicity of ideas. Nonetheless, the subject will also be perceived as possessing a creative potential, as available ideas are the point of departure but not the end. Subjects are not only seen as resisting and reacting here, but rather as creating, engaging in multiple strategies to live their lives.

In chapter 4, I explore the theme of self-representation and identities in female same-sex sexuality. In this chapter I am interested in how these women socially view and locate themselves. As I will discuss both the conventional Western model of sexual identity and the active/passive Latin-American model of same-sex sexuality contribute to the construction of the sexual and gendered self in Mexico City. The influence of feminism and economic changes also affect what it means to be a woman (and a man) in Mexico City. Gender and sexual identities also intersect with other axes of difference such as that of class which I found to be locally of great importance in self categorization and identification.

The themes of love and sexuality are explored in chapter 5. Traditionally, desire is conceived as originating from the male body, and female desire is perceived negatively, classifying women as good or bad in relation to their sexual conduct. Adapting the words of Elizabeth Grosz (1994:70) on lesbian desire, the question in relation to the Mexico City context is: "How can this concept [desire] be dramatically stretched to include as subject what it has previously been designated only by the position of object, to make

what is considered passivity into an activity?" While the virgin/whore binary often remains central in female same-sex sexuality, many women argue that a different set of meanings, from the traditional ones, take place. These subjectivities propose a refiguration of sexual desire, the female body and emotions. The theme of love, and the expectations that one has in a relationship are also discussed. Once again, traditional ideas on the couple have to be redefined in the context of female same-sex sexuality.

In chapter 6, women speak of their families and how they present and perform their ideas on gender and sexuality in that space. Social and economic changes have directly affected family composition and functioning. This in turn has an effect on the ways gender and sexuality can be lived and practiced. As most women I interviewed live at home with their families, this dynamic is of great importance to their lives. Chapters 4,5,6 could have been presented in a different order, as all these themes are interrelated and nourish one another.

The second part of the thesis, explores how these different aspects take place in the lives of these women. I present three testimonies where Andrea, Paula and Diana speak of their own lives. Testimonies offer the possibility, as Slim and Thompson (1993: 7) remark to reveal "the experience of hidden groups, and counters the bias of those who speak for or ignore them." Importantly, these three stories were the first part of the thesis I wrote, and they have changed very little since then. That is to say that I did not organize the information collected in interviews to build these stories in relation to previously written chapters. This different writing mode has the potential of crediting, discrediting and/or offering an alternative point of view on the preceding chapters. Nonetheless, I do underline the origin of their production, thus reminding the reader that these stories were

constructed in an intersubjective process. These testimonies have the potential of highlighting subjectivities. Ong (1995:356) who listened to the stories of diasporic Chinese women says that in life stories: "women can convey authentic concerns that challenge any prefigured definitions of their identity and reality." While chapter 3 focuses on the macrosocial changes, these testimonies represent particular lives. In Abu-Lughod's sense, they have the power to "undo the titles." That is to say that they can subvert traditional ways of thinking of Mexican women. They challenge our expectations and the possibilities of speaking of a unitary model of females practicing same-sex sexuality.

This research intends to contribute to the understandings of gender and sexuality in Mexico and Latin America that often still portrays uniform stereotypes for the whole region. It also hopes to illuminate the themes of social change, social class and the family in the Mexican context. Finally, while I present the subject as constructed by dominant ideas, I hope that these voices will also permit thinking of the subject as possessing a creative potential as well.

Chapter 2: The Setting and Method

2.1 The City

When I first conducted fieldwork in Mexico City from May 5th 2000 until December 23rd 2000 I lived in the upper middle-class neighborhood of *Colonia del Valle* in an apartment that I shared with a French student. The neighborhood had many parks and calm streets. It was a mainly residential area located between the South and Central parts of town. In February 2001 I returned to Mexico City as I wanted to extend my experience of living in the city. While I was looking for a new place I stayed with my grandmother in the southern part of the city. I then ended up staying for a couple of months in my girlfriend's apartment in the historical center, in *Colonia Centro*. The neighborhood was filled with sixteenth century buildings and churches surrounding the twentieth century skyscraper *Torre LatinoAmericana*. *Colonia Centro* was packed with businesses, cars, street vendors, street kids, tourists, politicians, new migrants to the city, few neighborhood residents, chaotic noises during the day and total silence and emptiness at night. Later on, I moved with some friends at the Southern extreme of the city in *Colonia Copilco*. This neighborhood was located between old *Coyoacan* and the national university (UNAM). A mix of middle-class family houses, funky cafes, bookstores and giant shopping malls characterized the area. Near the metro station Universidad, working class neighborhoods predominated. I lived in a big house with four of my friends who studied at UNAM until I returned to Montreal in December 2001. The different neighborhoods I lived in represent, some of the diverse faces that one can encounter in Mexico City.

Founded in 1325, as the Aztec kingdom of Tenochtitlán, the site of present-day Mexico City rapidly became a huge metropolis and trade and service center for one and a half million people who lived in the surrounding valley prior to the Spanish conquest. In 1521, it became the capital of New Spain when Spaniards took control of the site. Mexico City is located in a high mountain valley at approximately 2,200 meters above sea level (National Research Council, 1995:1), hundreds of miles from the sea or navigable rivers and is also the center of an earthquake zone. Despite its apparent non hospitable environment, the city has continuously attracted numerous migrants. However, it is not until recent decades that it acquired its enormous proportions. The metropolitan Mexico City area that was once composed of some buildings in the middle of a green valley and a nearby lake is now one of the largest cities on the planet. Every side of the valley is overcrowded with houses. The country that was once principally rural now contains most of its population in urban areas. In the 1940's a rapid economic expansion was experienced in the country. The mechanization of agriculture, industrial development and population pressures on limited land resources pushed migratory waves into towns which were transformed into cities (Urquidí, 1975). By 1980, as migratory waves of rural people transformed provincial towns into cities and the capital, Mexico City into a megalopolis, census figures for that year showed that the country had become more than two-thirds urban (Alba and Potter, 1986). Even though population figures are inexact, today it is estimated that 22 million people live in the Mexico City metropolitan area, which makes it the most densely populated city in the world (Moore and Anderson, 1997). While the rate of population growth has slowed and even declined since the 1980's, immigration to the surrounding jurisdictions has been responsible for significant

population increase and urban expansion within the greater metropolitan area (National Research Council, 1995:1). Rapid growth over the past 50 years has been characterized both by planned urban and residential areas for the middle and upper class, and by unplanned and illegal land appropriations by immigrants to the peripheral areas. Public services remain incomplete for long periods of time in the squatter settlements, even though they are eventually provided.

The city remains the center of the republic. It is responsible for 26% of the country's gross national product. Despite being an important economic center, unemployment was officially about 7% in 1997, but underemployment was chronic (Moore and Anderson, 1997). In the whole country, the informal economy is estimated to involve 50% of the work force (La Botz, 1999). The economic situation has been influenced by four currency devaluations since 1976 which have restrained savings. In the whole country by 1990, the richest 5% of the population received a third of national income, whereas the bottom 40% received a mere 12,8% of national income. (CCPNS, 1990). In the 1990's nearly half of the population fell below poverty line that is to say 41 million people among which 17 million lived in conditions of great poverty (Barry, 1992:96)

Mexico City is known for its permanent smog. The thickness of this artificial fog is so bad that the surrounding mountains are usually invisible. This phenomenon finds its roots in the fact that more than 3.6 million vehicles clog the streets, combined with 32 000 industrial plants that spew their pollutants in the air rendering air quality unsatisfactory by international standards 324 days of the year (Moore and Anderson, 1997). Mexico City is an unsafe city and inhabitants have reasons to feel insecure since

about 250 000 crimes are reported annually. Many crimes are committed by police officers, who make as little as 95\$ per week (Moore and Anderson, 1997). People in Mexico City are quick to mention that the police are perceived more as a menace than as secure force which one can count on. Such corruption is perceived as well on the governmental level.

Until July 2000, Mexico was essentially a political dictatorship for no effective parliamentary or extra-parliamentary opposition was tolerated. The PRI had been governing the country for the past 70 years without interruption. The PAN, a right wing political party, took office on December 2000 with the promise of a new era of democracy for the country. Since 1997, the Federal District has been in the hands of the PRD, a leftist government.

Like most countries today, Mexico entertains various economic relations with other nations. Recently, its relations with Canada have been increased through the NAFTA treaty. However, without any doubt the most influential, but yet ambiguous relation has been held with their immediate northern neighbor. This, in many cases exploitative, relationship has largely shaped the face of the country.

2.2 The Ambiente

The *ambiente* refers to a variety of spaces addressed to the sexual minority populations. It is mainly constituted of a circuit of discos and bars, but can also be used to denominate any space for this population such as cafes or discussion groups. The *ambiente* is in fact more than the physical space, it is a social world defying the traditional ideals on gender and sexuality that is developed and overall practiced in those space. Throughout the thesis, I often speak of the *ambiente*, this means the physical

space, but also this imaginary space, the networks, in which circulate these ideas which often challenge traditional notions of gender and sexuality.

The word can also refer to an individual having a sexual preference distinct to the heterosexual one. People will ask “*Eres de ambiente?*” which could be translated as “Are you of the ambiente?” or approximately “Are you queer?” The anthropologist Carrier (1995:13) who studied homosexual males in Guadalajara, Mexico explains *ambiente* as the word used by homosexual male to refer discreetly to a third person as homosexual. In the course of fieldwork I observed in effect, the word to be known mostly by people who were in contact with the *ambiente*. In brief, the *ambiente* is part of the setting where I conducted the study.

Throughout the text, group names and commercial spaces have been given pseudonyms in order to preserve the anonymity of people I met there. Only in the chapter “From Past to Present”, do the original names of lesbian groups appear, since these are not discussed in relation to specific people, but rather to the political work they accomplish.

The *ambiente* in Mexico City comprises many spaces, however, a large number of those spaces are addressed to men. Lesbian organizations can be good spaces to meet women practicing same-sex sexuality. Those groups are generally involved in activism. Some of them count as part of their activities discussion groups or workshops for women of sexual minorities. They are generally addressed to any woman, however some of those groups are primarily directed to specific people such as in the case of the lesbian mother group.

I met almost half of the women I interviewed at a space called *Mujeres Unidas*, a group that labels itself as a lesbian feminist organization but in reality welcomes women of all sexual preferences. The organization works for the defense of women's and sexual diversity rights. Various activities are also organized there, such as guitar lessons, dance lessons, Tae-kwon-do lessons, support groups, writing workshops etc. The space also has a documentation center where one can find queer magazines, books and other written and audiovisual documents.

Many women who came to the space were informed of its existence through TV shows discussing same-sex sexuality. The organization was also advertised in *Tiempo Libre*, a magazine about weekly entertainment. Some women tended to come regularly, specially when they participated in workshops that took place once a week. Others appeared once and never came back to the site. People often went out for coffee or to eat something after having spent some time at *Mujeres Unidas*. As organizers explained often to newcomers, this was a space where women made new friends and found a space where they could discuss their lives openly.

I met a few people at another group called *La casa de Frida*. This group met every three weeks. It was mainly based on a discussion group, serving as a support group for women with diverse sexual preferences (but mostly involved in female same-sex sexuality). A few people were informed of the existence of the group by a TV program, but also through *Tiempo Libre*. As in other discussion groups, themes related to same-sex sexuality were discussed. For example, the first time that I participated, the theme was "Is it possible to construct our own families?". Women explored the question and an organizer directed the dialogue, asking new questions, introducing a guest or presenting a

video. These discussion groups were useful to meet new research participants, but also to collect information since diverse points of view on a topic were given through the meetings.

During 2001 I attended some meetings of a third group that met at a cafe twice a month. The particularity of this group was that it was constituted of people who had met over the internet. The organizer decided to form the group after noticing that many women on the internet discussed that they would like to meet other lesbianas to form friendships or other types of relationships. Subsequently the organizer had a web site where over 200 women signed up to be informed of meeting dates. Over this list, 20 to 50 women attended the reunions every two weeks. The internet proved to be a great way of reaching people since of all the discussion groups I visited, this was the one that counted more women at every meeting. Unlike other groups, the meetings occurred at a women's cafe instead of a specific space assigned to the organization. Gender and sexuality issues were discussed there, but also unlike other groups, the organizer was not involved in any political party or larger organization. Therefore, women attending those meetings were rarely invited to participate in a rally or a protest as occurred in the two other spaces cited above. Also, women of different social classes, but mostly middle class women, seemed to attend the other groups while the internet group attracted more women of the upper-middle class. This might have been related to the fact that women of the upper-middle class had access to private computers at home or at work ,but also to the fact that the meetings originally occurred in La Condesa, an upper class neighborhood.

Clubs and bars of the *ambiente* were also a space where women practicing sex with women encountered each other. It is well known that those establishments often had to

pay high sums to local authorities in order to remain open, even though these amounts have considerably lowered in the past twenty years. These clubs and bars constantly closed, opened and reopened which made it difficult to keep track of their exact number in the city. I can probably estimate more than thirty different establishments, but a large number were addressed strictly to men. At the moment of fieldwork there were two bars only for women. However, there were soirées that occurred usually once a week in different bars that were only directed to women. In total, I went to seven different establishments, most of them located in central parts of the city. There were a great variety of places, sometimes where it was hard to perceive any similarity in terms of design, music and of clientele that could vary in terms of age, social class, gender etc. The experience of going to a *cantina* of the *ambiente* in the historic center, a working class neighborhood, is really different from going to a hip club near la Zona Rosa, a tourist area with restaurants and bars. Some places had no cover charge while others could cost as much as 200 pesos, approximately the equivalent of \$30CDN, a high price to pay when the minimum wage is approximately \$7CDN/day.

There were also two women's cafes at the time of fieldwork. Cafes were more of a space to talk with friends and less based on dancing and flirting as were bars and discos. The latter spaces were often chosen by couples who wished to kiss, touch and hold hands without being subjected to looks from strangers.

2.3 From Myself to the Field

When I first started my graduate studies, I had no idea that I would involve myself in a project concerning female same-sex sexuality in Mexico City. Throughout the first semester my desire to return to this city became clear. It motivated me to envision a

project that would take place in this urban context. Spontaneously, the idea of conducting research with lesbians came to my mind. I tell this story as if I never had thought about it and it struck me as a bolt of lightning but, in fact, below the surface, I should have predicted that I was heading in that direction. I remember looking for information related to homosexuality in anthropology, a personal interest, during my undergraduate period. Trained as an archeologist, I was familiar with the feeling of digging for material and finding minimal pieces of information here and there. If the topic of homosexuality was rarely treated, the one of female same-sex sexuality was even more hidden. Without any doubt, there has been little research on the topic, especially in countries of the South, often called "Third world" countries. My research intends to present voices that have not been heard. Listening to those voices constitutes an important contribution since it is a differently situated knowledge which might permit understanding of the particularity of gender and sexuality in Mexico City.

Looking for those voices I left Montreal in May 2000. Surprisingly, I crossed almost all of North America by bus. I traveled from Montreal to El Paso, where I stayed for two weeks and then from Ciudad Juarez to Mexico City. I crossed the first border, saw the vegetation dry every time the bus got closer to the second border. The path led me across the red sand desert of Chihuahua and I witnessed the body of the high plateaus grow under the wheels of the bus that was taking me to Mexico City.

I describe this moment as the beginning of the voyage, but I am not sure that this was the moment or the space where fieldwork exactly started. Born in Montreal with a Mexican mother and a Paraguayan father, reading about Mexico echoed some aspects of my family life and brought back many memories of my multiple visits to Mexico.

Growing up for most of my life in Quebec City, my connection to Mexico had never been total. I have traveled every two or three years to Mexico City and family and friends have constantly come back and forth to visit. At the moment of departure, my position in relation to Mexico did not make me a total “outsider.” Neither did I feel like an “insider.” I felt like a person living between many in-betweens. As Narayan(1997:37) argues, it is more profitable to focus “on shifting identities in relationship with the people and issues an anthropologist seeks to represent” than on the pure idea of “insiders” and “outsiders” in a world where identities tend to be multiplex.”

When I first arrived in Mexico on June 5th 2000, I stayed with my grandmother on the first week. Every time I went out she reminded me to be careful and said that she wished I did not have my little accent in Spanish, since it would be safer for me to remain unidentified as a foreigner. My eyes, my hair and my skin melted on the urban landscape, as long as my mouth remained shut, I would be perceived as a regular *chilanga* (Mexico City inhabitant).

I spent my first few days looking for an apartment, which I came to share with a French student. After spending my first two weeks with my family, my roommate and his French and Mexican friends, I met my first consultants from the *ambiente* in a meeting at a group called *La casa de Frida*. With them, as with most people I first encountered, they did not immediately realize I was a foreigner. It was usually after a moment of discussion that people would ask me, unsure if I was Mexican. When I said that I had been there only for a couple of weeks they did not understand why I spoke Spanish with almost no mistake. I then answered that I grew up speaking Spanish in Canada with my parents and family friends.

At the beginning, as much as I was curious to know about lesbian life in Mexico City people were intrigued about it in Montreal, obviously for different reasons. Many discussions were initiated on what I liked from Mexico and why was I there. As time advanced, some people continued with the habit of telling me "In Mexico this is like this or like that." Others did not mark a difference between them and me anymore. For some people, I was "enough Mexican" to the point they wanted to involve me in some political activities. During the last months people rarely noticed that I was not from Mexico, my friends teased me that I spoke like a real *chilanga*. This led me to curious situations such as when once I asked the sister of one of my friends at what age men did their military service. She looked at me without understanding and I had to quickly specify that I was not from Mexico and that was the reason I did not know something so simple. Some facets of my identity were pulled to the front when necessary. For example, on one occasion, I mistakenly got involved in a fight at a women's bar, by separating the two opponents. Luckily this gesture had no negative consequences on anybody but one of the women was bothered by the fact I separated her by force and overall I had hurt her pride. My friends defended me saying that I did not know I should have stayed away from this conflict since I was from Canada. On the one hand my friends partially believed the argument that they were posing to explain my action but I knew that the principal reason for stressing the accent on my foreigner status was to protect me.

Since I met people in lesbian spaces, they generally assumed that I was attracted towards women. When I said that I was there because I was doing research on female same-sex sexuality they often asked "But are you *gay*?" I was never too sure if they asked because my presence did not correspond to what they had assumed or because they

did not think that a lesbian could do research on same-sex sexuality, lacking “objectivity”. Later on, I realized that it was rather common, in spaces of the *ambiente*, to inquire about a person’s sexual identity.

The fact of having the potential of being attracted to women, like the women who participated in this research, highly influenced the type of information I had access to. In writing those words I don’t mean to suggest that my sexual preference gave me some kind of “insider” status. As Lewin (1995:324) notes, the assumption that gay and lesbian investigators would benefit from a sort of insider status is similar to the one that occurred when the anthropology of women was launched. There is no such a thing as essential beings called lesbians. The self cannot be detached from the context in which gender, sexuality and their performance are constructed. Perhaps more important than my potential attraction to women, was the way I agreed to participate (See in this section, “Interaction with Research Participants”).

2.4 Research Participants: Who they are

In the course of research I spoke with diverse people in terms of age, sex, gender and class. In fact, any person could provide an interesting piece of information on female same-sex sexuality in Mexico City. For example, at a party a man was telling me how he reacted to his friend when she told him she had a woman lover. The majority of people that I came in contact with were less than 30 years old and the largest proportion of them were women, although a few were men.

However, information was principally collected with individuals who were born female at birth, recognized themselves as women socially during the time of fieldwork

and practiced female same sex sexuality. Of the women who were interviewed the youngest was 19 years old while the eldest had turned 30 years of age by the time of the interview. All the interviewees lived in the Mexico City metropolitan area, which includes the DF (Federal district) and the surrounding state, Estado de Mexico (Mexico State). I must have met more than a hundred females practicing same-sex sexuality in the course of fieldwork.

During fieldwork, I was introduced to a wide range of spaces and neighborhoods of different social classes in the urban area. Social classes, being extremely marked in Mexico, I wished to interview women of various social classes. The search for differences made me realize that women frequenting the *ambiente* pertained principally, but not exclusively, to the middle classes. Among the interviewees 11 lived in middle-class neighborhoods, 4 in upper middle-class neighborhoods, although 7 lived in working class neighborhood. The process of determining someone's social class was rather subjective. During the interview I inquired as to which social class people identified. Interestingly many of the women who affirmed to be part of the lower middle-class, also said they lived in a working class neighborhood. The stigma attached to the working classes in Mexico might have prevented them from identifying with it. Their occupation was not always an indicator, since many of them were students or were initiating their professional lives. When I present the interviewees, I then indicate in which type of neighborhood they lived, rather than labeling them with a specific social class. None of the interviewees said they pertained to, or lived in an upper class neighborhood. In Mexico, only a few families pertain to the upper classes since the distribution of wealth is extremely unequal and 10% of the population possess 70% of the national income

(Avilés, 1996). I did not know anyone of this class until 2001, when I met two unrelated women living in the most expensive and prestigious neighborhood, where people of the upper classes are known to live. While I interviewed four women living in upper middle class neighborhoods, I was also close to other women in the same situation whom I did not interview. Those women had access to money and cars and were generally university educated. Those relationships were not a reflection of the traditional North-South bond so often described in the anthropological literature, where the North American anthropologist possesses materially far more than local people. Neither did I feel that my relationships with women of the upper working or other middle classes were so different in the field itself. Speaking directly of money, when I did have the money I paid for them; when they had the money they paid for me as it usually is between friends.

Among the interviewees all had *preparatoria* schooling (grade 11 to 13) and many were university educated as well. This represents a level of education that is above the national average where about two thirds of women have attended primary and secondary school, though they may not have graduated and about 14.6 percent of women have college or post-graduate education (La Botz, 1999). When I searched for someone to interview who did not have any *preparatoria* schooling I was unable to find anyone under 30 years of age. This does not mean that women with few years of schooling do not practice same-sex sexuality but I can affirm that they do not frequent the *ambiente* as much. Perhaps, this is also a reaffirmation, as other studies demonstrate, that women with more schooling are found to have more control over the practice of their own sexuality (Figueroa Perea and Rivera Reyes, 1993).

Among the seven women who lived in a working class neighborhood, one was attending university while all the others had *preparatoria* schooling and were working (or looking for work) at the moment of the interview. The majority of women living in middle class neighborhoods had some university education, except for four.

There was one thing I had that most of them did not, regardless of their social class, and this was the apartment where I lived. When we went out late, people often expected to stay at my house since it was in a central location and they did not have to deal with their parents other than saying that they were staying at my house.

Even though there were daily news reports related to native communities, the issue of ethnicity was rarely mentioned by people. The national discourse on the mestizo, constituting the roots of the nation, might be part of the reason why the theme is often buried. The 1994 conflict of Chiapas challenged the idea of sameness created by nationalist ideals and the idea of diversity was introduced (Earle, 1994). The door to a plural Mexico has now been opened, which as I further argue in the conclusion, has permitted the affirmation of various identities in the public place. Nonetheless, this shift being recent, it is perhaps not surprising that in the course of interviews several women were confused when I asked with which ethnic group they identified. I left them speechless or they provided answers such as “What do you mean?”, “I don’t know”, “none” or jokingly “I am chilanga”. The issue of ethnicity in identity construction which is viewed as crucial in North America was seen as almost irrelevant by most women I knew. Social class was seen as a much more meaningful marker to classify people and their way of living in Mexico City.

I also experienced difficulty in finding interview participants who were or had been married or participants who were mothers. Those women were generally over the age of 30 and I was only able to interview two women who were mothers and had been married to a man. Nevertheless, calls from married women were often received at *Mujeres Unidas* to the point that they thought of initiating a group for married women. Where were those women who called but did not frequently appear on the site? Perhaps at home or at work, fulfilling responsibilities towards their family that unmarried daughters did not have to complete. But I have to believe that there were not so many (or it was kept a secret) since even divorced women did not seem to frequent the *ambiente*, as much. The possibilities of going to lesbian spaces, often far from their houses in this gigantic city were perhaps greater for women free of family responsibilities. It is rather difficult to advance that my sample is representative of females practicing same-sex sexuality in Mexico City. Representative samples are difficult to obtain for stigmatized populations, not to say impossible (Stein, 1997:6).

While I have said I felt that my relationships with my informants were not so asymmetrical, I am not blind to the fact that I am the one writing about their lives which creates a power differential regarding who will have and use the words to represent whom. As José Limón (1997:79) has commented on the limits of positive rewriting, “however “liberating” a narrative discourse we propose to write, it is always intimate with power, and many of our “informants,” “subjects,” “consultants,” “teachers,” “friends” know it. Earlier on in 2000, the issue of representation caused a large controversy in the lesbian movement in Mexico City when the book *Un Amor que se*

Atrevio a Decir su Nombre (A love that dared to say its name (2000) by Norma Mogrovejo, was printed. The text was originally a Ph.D. thesis that discussed the development of lesbian movements in Latin America, particularly in Mexico. Mogrovejo conducted interviews with many women who were part of different organizations in the movement. Many of them felt that their words were used at the convenience of the author without necessarily representing their whole vision. While the book was acclaimed in the academic world receiving many honorific mentions, several lesbian groups mobilized to express that they felt misrepresented. Other groups supported Mogrovejo and defended that there were various visions of history and her work was one of many.

2.5 Research Tools and Interaction with Research Participants

The principal tool used in this research was participant observation where I took the role of , as anthropologist Robert Carrier (1995:xviii) phrases it, “participant-as-observer” which is full participation with the women I studied while making it clear I was doing research. I met consultants through principally two means: lesbian organizations and *ambiente* bars and cafes. Thereafter, I entered in contact with many other women through the snowball effect. I spent on average six days a week in the company of research participants. I usually wrote partial notes at night and spent one or two afternoons a week writing an extended version of my notes. From the many acquaintances I met in the field, I developed many strong friendships. In terms of activities, my life as a friend was not so different from the one I have in Montreal. We talked, we played music, we wrote in writing workshops, we went to coffee shops, restaurants, parties, clubs, movies, special events etc. I considered them my friends as I

felt they did me but I am not blind to the fact that our initial motives for approaching one another were not the same ones. Blackwood (1995) warns us on the use of the term “friend” in anthropological writing, which can mask the deep complexity of ethnographic relations. At the beginning, my motive was to gather information but by spending time together I became attached to the people I met and the feeling that I developed towards them was one of friendship. However, I cannot hide the fact that I observed everything they did and made notes of what they said, a process that has not so much to do with friendship. For this reason, I attempted to be clear with people that I was also there doing research. On some occasions, such as in bars I did some observations where it was impossible for all the people to be aware of my activities. I regularly took notes but rarely in front of people. On some occasions I said that I liked an idea or a sentence and I mentioned to the person that I would like to make use of it for my thesis. This was often done to underline what kind of observation I did since, even though I explained to people the concept of fieldwork, some still thought that I collected most of my information in dusty libraries.

A great amount of information was also gathered through 22 semi- structured interviews (see below for the list of participants and appendices for questionnaire). I generally attempted to cover most of the questions, but I did not force participants to follow a particular structure. Often themes concerning the end of the interview were explored from the beginning since they were spontaneously mentioned. A large part of those interviews were based on following the flow of a conversation by asking “and then what happened?” These narratives were interesting as they underlined subjectivities. This method was useful to perceive how women self-represented themselves and how they

creatively pieced together ideas that are available in Mexico City. Most interviews lasted for periods of approximately two hours. Every person was interviewed once with the exception of Andrea with whom I recorded additional information in order to complete her life story.

I also recorded four informal conversations. In the course of a talk that appeared interesting to me I would ask people involved in it if I could record the conversation. This seemed to produce more spontaneous information since after a couple of minutes people forgot about the tape recorder and I was not the center of attention like in an interview.

In the process of writing I realized that I had little information on sexual practices. Women mentioned they had sexual relations without being very explicit about them. With the help of two friends who identify as lesbians I elaborated a questionnaire on sexual practices (see appendices) This was a short questionnaire that 55 women filled in anonymously. I went to a lesbian cafe on a Friday night at seven o'clock when I knew it would be crowded. I asked every person of less than 30 years old to complete it. No one opposed, however some women did not answer some questions on paper. Others came and asked me the meaning of some questions, which leads me to believe that some questions were misunderstood by other women who did not ask me to be precise about the meaning. The rest of the questionnaires were filled at the meeting of the women who had met over the internet. I also brought some questionnaires to the soccer field. In all cases respondents, slid their answers in an envelope which enabled me to distinguish who had completed each copy.

I recorded interviews on a little Walkman that I was able to carry around. I did some of them at my apartment, or in the house of the interviewee but the majority were conducted in public spaces such as cafes or sitting in a park. People were usually more relaxed and opened to discuss in public spaces since it made the interview like an informal talk over coffee. In addition, not all women felt free to speak of the details of their sexualities at home in front of their families with whom they generally lived.

I knew most women before the interview. All of them responded positively to my invitation to participate. In two cases, they preferred me to write the data instead of recording it and I respected their wish. Evidently I could not write every single word down as the tape recorder permits it, nevertheless, useful information was expressed in the course of those interviews. At the end of the interviews I thanked people for the participation and told them that it was so precious what they had given to me because it was a piece of their lives. Many of them answered that they thought I was doing something important and necessary. However, others said they had agreed to participate in this research because they were my friends and they wanted to help me. I did not correspond to the image of a researcher that people had in their minds, which I believe led them to perceive me as a friend before anything else. Even though I was 25 years old during fieldwork, people usually thought I was 19 years old. Even when they knew my age, they still thought that I was young to be a graduate student.

On some occasions women approached me with other intentions than simply friendship. This happened to be problematic, because sometimes people agreed to participate in order to get closer to me. On four occasions I received gifts after the

interview, which is a sign of romantic and/or erotic interest. I had to make it clear that the fact that I had invited them for an interview did not mean that I was interested in them. In the course of fieldwork I eventually felt attracted towards some women and I started contemplating the possibility of dating. On two occasions, events took a more serious direction, but neither of those episodes developed into very long-term relationships. Through those experiences I found myself positioned in a space where I saw female same-sex sexuality in Mexico from other angles than when I listened to people stories. As Kulick and Wilson (1995) mention the author's sexuality and sexual experiences significantly affects the research.

But curiously, it was not until 2001, when I returned to Mexico City and I was living free of constant fieldwork preoccupations, that my experiences with women really affected my vision on female same-sex sexuality. In that period my motives for being on the site were different than they had been during fieldwork. I simply felt good in Mexico City and I wanted to dig the city deeper. Through that year I lived for a couple of months in my lover's apartment. Observing women interacting with each other, and being with a woman who had some expectations that are common in the local context happened to be a different experience. Wieringa (1999:208) describes a similar situation where she found herself involved in butch/femme communities of Jakarta and Lima, where she not only observed her informants but was socialized by them, as she says : "In their view my behavior did not always fulfill their expectations, and they set out to correct me." This process turned out to be difficult in the sense that not responding to an expectation not only meant provoking a reaction where my behavior was reproached, but in many cases it also meant hurting someone without even being aware of it. The relationship did not last

for very long. After a couple of months, I initiated dating another woman. Once again I was confronted with similar issues, for example with the fact that I was not courteous enough which consists in acts such as letting a woman pass first, pulling the chair for her, opening the door of a car for her, paying for her etc. Such acts are rather common in heterosexual couples (mostly during courtship), but also between women, where a woman is courteous, or both act as such in the relationship. It was in those moments that I was reminded that our similar desire towards women did not necessarily mean, similar identities, practices and expectations of one another. Neither do I want to suggest that there were identical expectations from all women desiring women, but there were certainly hegemonic ideals on what constitutes a couple and how partners should behave.

In the course of the second year in Mexico City, I realized that things changed so fast in the city and I only occasionally saw most of the friends I had met during fieldwork. Some got involved in new relationships and spent all of their time with their new girlfriend. Others ended relationships and preferred to remain distant from their old crowd, still others started working or attending school full time and had really little time to spend with their friends. The use of my time also changed. I now had to get up early every morning to go to work, and I also was involved in a new relationship. When I started writing the thesis on my first return from fieldwork in December 2000, I was highly concerned by the confidentiality issue. Especially since I felt that everybody knew each other in the *ambiente*. However, in the second year I realized that only a few people kept frequenting with the same regularity these spaces. I am still concerned by the issue, but with perspective I can see that there has been so much movement. Names, and in

some cases occupation, being slightly changed are sufficient to keep peoples' identities anonymous.

The time I spent in Mexico City was intense. While the external geography surrounding my life changed, my internal landscape could only change as well. From an everyday perspective I did not realize how much I had changed (or my perspective had) until one of my Canadian friends came to visit me, in the course of my second summer in Mexico. She noticed things that had become invisible to me, green taxis, clothing styles, the music, the taste of food etc. Overall, I noticed certain behaviors I had towards her since she was my guest. I remember going for dinner to a part of town called La Condesa and feeling the urge to hold the umbrella for her. I had to repeat several times in my mind “She can do it, she can do it !” My own behavior surprised me. Even though I tried to reason myself from thinking that there was no motive for me to have to carry my friend’s umbrella, I could not overcome this feeling of guilt I had. Contradictorily, I strongly felt that I was acting impolitely while I knew well that my Canadian friend did not perceive it that way. That was the moment when I realized to which point I had adopted many of the practices I had been observing for several months.

2.6 Interview Participants

The information is provided here according to the moment of the interview. I systematically indicate, the age, with whom the person lives, in a neighborhood of which social class, and where I met the person. Any additional information might vary from person to person.

Alicia is 20 years old. She lives with her mother, father and brother in a working class

neighborhood. She works as a junior secretary for an important company in Mexico. She completed her preparatoria studies, but is now planning to study computer science in university. I met Alicia at la Casa de Frida.

Ana Maria is 22 years old. She lives with her mother and brother in a working class neighborhood in Estado de Mexico. She works as a photographer's assistant. She completed two years of preparatoria schooling and we met through a friend that is listed here.

Andrea is 23 years old and she lives with her mother, father and sister in a middle-class neighborhood. She works in public relations and completed a university degree in communications. We met at Mujeres Unidas.

Diana is 25 years old. She lives with her mother and brother in a working class neighborhood. She works as an assistant graphic designer. She completed preparatoria studies. We met through a friend that is listed here.

Elena is 30 years old. She lives with her mother in a middle-class neighborhood and works as an office clerk. She completed her preparatoria studies. We met through a friend who played in my soccer team.

Eli is 19 years old, she lives with her mother and two sons in an upper middle-class neighborhood. She works as a choreographer and has completed one year of law studies in university. I met Eli through a friend that is listed here.

Elsa is 26 years old. She lives in an apartment by herself in a middle-class neighborhood. She works as a cook in a café. She completed one year in finance in university. We met through a friend who was a regular customer at the café.

Eva is 20 years old. She lives with her mother and aunt in Mexico City in a middle-class

neighborhood. She is unemployed and she completed *preparatoria* studies. We met at a bar.

Frida is 20 years old. She lives with her mother and father in a working class *vecindad*.

She is enrolled in political science in university. We met in the writing workshop at Mujeres Unidas.

Isabel is 20 years old. She lives with her mother, father, aunt, brother, sister in law and two nephews in a working class neighborhood. She works as a private music lessons teacher and as a receptionist in the mornings in a small office. We met at Mujeres Unidas.

Karina is 27 years old, living with her girlfriend and five roommates in an upper middle-class neighborhood. She works as an office manager for the government. She is completing her university degree in hispanic literature. We met through a friend that I had previously met through another friend that is listed here.

Karla is 29 years old, living with a friend in a middle-class neighborhood. She works in a public relations agency. We met at the internet meeting group.

Marina is 26 years old. She lives with her mother, father and brother in an upper middle-class neighborhood. She studies medicine in university. We met through a group of friends that I had previously met at Mujeres Unidas.

Maya is 26 years old. She lives by herself in a middle-class neighborhood in Estado de Mexico. She works as an accountant and has completed a university degree in accounting. We met through a mutual friend that I had met at Mujeres Unidas.

Nadia is 20 years old. She lives with her aunt in a middle-class neighborhood. She

works as an comedian for a theatre company. She completed preparatoria studies, we met through a mutual friend that is listed here.

Paula is 26 years old. She lives with her mother, father, brother, sister, aunt and cousin in a middle-class neighborhood. She dedicates her time to sexual diversity activism. She completed a university degree in visual arts. We met at Mujeres Unidas.

Silvia is 21 years old. She lives with her grandparents in a middle-class neighborhood. She is unemployed and has completed two years of preparatoria studies. We met at Mujeres Unidas.

Sofia is 23 years old, she lives with her mother, step father and brother in an upper middle-class neighborhood. She is unemployed and has completed a university degree in marketing. She has volunteered at Mujeres Unidas, where we met.

Valeria is 29 years old. She lives by herself in a middle-class neighborhood. She works in the public relation field. She completed a university degree in communications. We met at a poetry collective.

Yadeli is 23 years old. She lives with her mother in a working class neighborhood. She is unemployed and completed one year of preparatoria schooling. We met at a bar.

Xia is 22 years old, lives with her mother, father and two brothers in a working class neighborhood in Estado de Mexico. She is a musician in the subway. She completed preparatoria studies. We met at queer pride.

Xotchil is 24 years old. She lives in an apartment by herself in a middle-class neighborhood. She is enrolled in a dance school at a preparatoria level. We met at Mujeres Unidas.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Hegemony, Ideas and Power

In order to explore how the subjectivities of females practicing same-sex sexuality are positioned in relation to dominant ideas on gender and sexuality in Mexico City, I will first establish the theoretical notions of hegemony, ideas and power.

The concept of hegemony was described by Gramsci, at the beginning of the 20th century, influenced by Marx and neo- Kantian notions. This Gramscian idea explains the complex ways in which the dominant class maintains its control over society, which does not rest "on the formal political system and the state- operated apparatus of coercion, but spreads beyond state and politics into the social and cultural arrangements of everyday life" (Wolf, 1999:44). Gramsci elaborated a model, where hegemony was constituted of ideas that came to appear spontaneous and "natural", but in fact this privileged status was the result of the historical prestige enjoyed by the ruling class by virtue of their position (White, 1992:166). The distribution of those ideas favored some and disadvantaged others. In this vision, social conflicts were expressed as a struggle for hegemony, therefore as a continuous process of contestation.

Eric Wolf's *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* (1999) retains much from the Gramscian concept of hegemony. What interests me in Wolf's work is his quest to explore the relationships between ideas and power. Rather than being viewed as a unitary force, Wolf (1999:4) presents power "as an aspect of all relations among people." This power works differently between people, institutions and in society as a whole. In the introduction, Wolf (1999:4) speaks of ideas "as a range of mental constructs rendered manifest in public representations, populating all human domains."

Wolf distinguishes between the concept of "ideas" and "ideology", as he believes that ideologies are developed to give or manifest power. Therefore ideologies are not to be equated to ideation. Wolf (1999:6) also specifies that it is important to observe how ideas are communicated since these do not float in incorporeal space but they "acquire substance through communication in discourse and performance." Verbal communication and nonverbal communication such as gestures, bodily comportment, iconographic displays of objects and representations, "provide vehicles to convey ideas" (Wolf, 1999:6).

Highly embedded in a Marxist view, Wolf illustrates through three case studies, Kwakiutl, Aztec and Nazi Germany, how the ideas produced by an elite promotes their own interests and work to generalize and universalize them, so the rest of society adopts the ruling class's ideas as their own. Wolf demonstrates how these ideas are closely intertwined with power and actively work to modify structures of power. While Wolf examines the existence of ideas that are located in a favorable location within power, I am also interested in according a special attention to the life of ideas that do not enjoy this privileged relationship with power. These ideas are similar to what Foucault calls "subjugated narratives," a knowledge produced by the dominated ones (cited in Limón, 1997: 64).

In this theoretical framework subjects are mainly seen as constructed through dominant ideas that enjoy a privileged position within power. In Mexico City, as I will discuss in the literature review in chapter 3, one of the dominant ideas on women's sexuality suggests that sexual relations should not be practiced before marriage. Whether or not subjects adopt this idea, they relationally position themselves to it. This positioning

is often described as an appropriation or resistance. As Foucault has stated “where there is power there is resistance” (1978:95-96). However, this resistance is not to be understood simply as reactionary, subversive ideas or practices embedded in meaning, they are not simply the negative opposition of a dominant idea. While the subject is constructed at the crossroads of different dominant ideas, the case of female same-sex sexuality in Mexico, offers an interesting intrigue because in reading the literature it seems that most dominant ideas promote the view that it cannot exist. The analysis of dominant ideas is, then, not sufficient to understand how subjectivities are constructed. I present here a different view of subjects as possessing a creative potential.

3.2 Subjectivities and Creativity

In a modernist sense, as first suggested by Descartes, the subject constitutes a knowing and thinking subject. In this perspective, feminists have remarked as de Beauvoir suggests that woman is no subject at all, but the Other, the object (cited in Hekman, 1995:196). Women in this view, is object deprived of its own vision of the world, of subjectivity. In similar ways, traditional anthropology creates a subject/object, where the anthropologist holds the place of the knowing subject while the consultant is created as an object. The feminist anthropologist holds then an awkward position, as the Other, the object in a patriarchal sense, but as well as the self, as the subject, in relation to anthropology. As Strathern (1987) noted there is then an uneasy relationship between feminism and anthropology.

On this difficult relation, Stacey (1988) believes that the two disciplines are not reconcilable. Feminist politics are incompatible with ethnography, as "the research

product is ultimately that of the researcher, however modified or influenced by informants" (Stacey, 1988:22). By contrast, Abu- Lughod (1990) is more optimistic about the possibility of a feminist ethnography. She believes it to be possible through the particularities of women's lives and stories. She suggests that the self/other dichotomy is destabilized by feminist anthropology that recognizes difference in sameness, constructing a self responding to multiple identities, but yet a self, endangering the pillars of the anthropological enterprise.

The notion of "situated knowledge", developed by Haraway (1988) permits one to view anthropologist and consultant as located in multiple positions, rather than as single faceted selves embedded in a single power location. The writer is always historically and socially located and her/his knowledge is always partial and infused in the varied visions that the subject holds. Such a notion allows the subject to be seen as multifaceted and acknowledges that neither anthropologists nor consultants are homogeneous selves.

While the self/other relation is destabilized by the multiple positions we all occupy, I believe that there are certainly methods that give more place to the subjectivities of consultants. In order to bypass the objectification of subjects in the social sciences, feminists have employed various strategies, among others the inclusion of "women's language," "voice," "words". These terms have been used "not only to designate every day talk but also, much more broadly, to denote the public expression of a particular sense of the self and social life, the effort to represent one's own experience, rather than accepting the representations of more powerful others" (Gal, 1991:176). Life stories are powerful catalysts that offer the possibilities of representing subjectivities. In

this spirit, theoretical writings on women's life stories have multiplied (see Behar 1990, Geiger 1986, Berger Gluck and Patai 1991).

As I previously discussed, dominant ideas intervene in subject construction. Such an approach presents subjectivities as the result of dominant ideas. However, not only dominant ideas intervene in the construction of subjectivities, as Hekman (1995:203) proposes, drawing on Foucault and Butler. She indicates that "even though in every era there will be hegemonic discourses, other nonhegemonic discourses will also exist, forming a discursive mix from which subjectivity can be constructed." Hekman redefines then individual creativity as the multiple combinations that subjects piece together. It is analogous to the creativity involved in speaking a language (Hekman 1995: 204).

As I will be presenting, there are various ideas on gender and sexuality in Mexico City, that are "pieced together" by subjects. As testimonies will have the potential to illustrate, multiple combinations of available ideas can be juxtaposed. Bloom (1998) who analyzed women's narratives also describes competing discourses to be multiple at a given time. She notices that individuals may articulate contradictory discourses in a single narrative: "In one sentence or one description of an experience or feeling, an individual may articulate a number of conflicting discourses in attempting to make sense of and represent life experience" (Bloom, 1998:100). Subjectivities are in this view nonunitary.

The subject might, or not, be conscious of these contradictions (as we all are). The necessity to see subjectivity as a unitary and coherent whole has been described as a hegemonic view of the self. Nonetheless there are clear moments in which subjects are conscious of their relation to power and their position in relation to dominant ideas. They somehow display what Braidotti (1994) calls a nomadic consciousness:

Nomadic consciousness is akin to what Foucault calls countermemory; it is a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self. Feminist- or other critical intellectuals as nomadic subject- are those who have forgotten to forget injustice and symbolic poverty: their memory is activated against the stream; they enact a rebellion of subjugated knowledges (Braidotti, 1994:25).

As it is illustrated multiple times the subject has the capacity of questioning dominant ideas. Women are conscious that sexual desire is negatively viewed in dominant ideas. But yet they speak of it in ways that dominant ideas do not have words for and they reflect on it from their location, a space in which desire was not imagined for them as it should ideally remain silenced. Therefore the subject patches a variety of ideas that are available in its surrounding but s/he also produces its own ideas.

3.3 Sex, Gender and Identities

The sex/gender system was first formulated by the anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1975). She defined it as the “set of arrangements upon which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity and in which these transformed needs are satisfied (1975: 159).” In this view sex stands for the biological sexed bodies which in the West are considered to be male or female. Gender is the cultural construct that is attributed to these sexed bodies, that is to say man and woman.

The road taken by feminist anthropology, launched in the 1970's, illustrated early, the importance of distinguishing between sex and gender. In previous decades, anthropology was dominated by male accounts through a world view that privileged the “male gaze”. In an attempt to correct this situation, women anthropologists went to the field and made women their primary focus. Behind this practice lay the assumption that women studying women would share a similar view of the world with their subjects. During the 1970's, one of the main preoccupations of feminist anthropology was the

search for a universal definition of woman. This belief was immediately questioned, as Moore states (1988:5): “fears were expressed that what had once been ‘male bias’ would be replaced by a corresponding ‘female bias’.” This debate in turn interrogated the validity of the category ‘woman’ (Ortner and Whitehead, 1981) which led to allowing more importance to the concept of gender as socially constructed in its specific context. In the course of this discussion, it also became evident that adding women’s voices was not sufficient. Many feminist anthropologists such as Rubin (1984) and Ortner and Whitehead (1981) undertook a theorization of genders as constructed in relationship to others. Therefore, any analysis had to include men as well. Standing on the concept of gender, feminist anthropology became more than the exclusive study of the ambiguous category ‘woman’. Genders are now understood as being shaped within a cultural, economic, and political system and also as historically situated (Lamphere, Ragoné and Zavella, 1997:4).

The debate surrounding the ‘woman’ category had profound implications for theory. In effect, as Moore (1988:11) has suggested, there was a shift from considering universality as the main ingredient of theoretical constructs to contemplating difference as the central element. Increasing attention has been given to women in different positions in the same society (see Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Collier and Yanagisako 1987). This change has directed many scholars to examine how race, class and ethnicity are intertwined with gender, ultimately leading to different identities. These avenues have been influenced without any doubt by authors outside the discipline of anthropology such as hooks (1984) or Anzaldúa (1987), who have argued that the experience of gender is modified by other identity markers. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

(1987), the Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa discusses how she is figuratively crossed by many borders. To a certain extent these are permeable borders that culturally infiltrate one another such as it is the case along the Mexican/American border. Each border is a metaphor of her gender, sexual and ethnic identities. As these interpenetrate one another and define a new identity, she names herself "The new Mestiza".

Today in Mexico City, people often perceive the exterior appearance of the sexed body as indicative of the sex and consequently of a person's gender. However, as I will discuss further on, studies on male same-sex sexuality in Latin America, tend to recognize that gender is also attributed in a sexual behavior/gender system (see Kulick 1997). In such a view, the sexed body loses meaning and the sex/gender equation in invalid. But this construction does not entirely exclude the fact that gender attribution in relation to sex is present in the context. From a very young age, children will be socialized according to the appearance of their sexed body. In Mexico City, many girls have their earlobes pierced as babies and they are dressed in white dresses and scolded if they get dirty, while boys are permitted to be wild and noisy (Prieur, 1998: 119). Traditionally, as a child, one will then be initiated into one of the two genders available in Mexico City, that is to say man or woman.

Gender can be studied under different markers, such as gender roles, gender performance, and so on. But I will consider here the theme of gender identity, as it proves to be a useful catalyst to understand how people perceive, locate and represent their

selves. Individual identity as it is traditionally conceived in the West, speaks of a bounded self. An individual existing in the universe as a separate and distinct being.

Such imagery echoes Erickson's (1968) concept of identity as it was first brought into the social sciences from philosophy. Identity refers to the organization of self-perceptions concerning one's relationship to certain categories, and that can also include views of the self-perceived to be held by others. As Gutmann (1996:18) puts it, Erickson provided interesting insights such as proposing that identities can be understood as relative to one another, and as in process, and thus that the relation between identity and history is fundamental.

Nevertheless, cross-cultural studies indicate that individual identity often reflects a hegemonic way of viewing the self in the West, more than it reflects local categories that organize the world in a certain context. More particularly, in Mexico, the Mexican sociologist Ana Amúchastegui (2001) suggests that historical factors delineate a different trajectory, than in many European countries, of the concept of a bounded self. In effect, two elements need to be considered: First is the Prehispanic conception of the self as part of the universe and of its social group, and second is the tendency towards solidarity and group unity in Spanish culture. These elements were present since the colonial period, until capitalist ideals entered Mexico and a hybrid construction of the individual, including group unity and individualism emerged (Amúchastegui 2001:412). In her study conducted in urban and rural areas, Amúchastegui concludes that individualism prevails in urban areas particularly among the privileged middle classes. In this case, a person represents her/himself as an autonomous individual, while in rural areas these

tendencies are lower and people speak more of their identities as collective, and as being merged to their social group (Amúchastegui, 2001:412-413).

The modern and unitary self possessing a coherent identity, has also gone through a great deal of criticism in the West. One of the important critics of a coherent gender identity is Judith Butler (1990, 1993). Drawing, among others, on de Beauvoir's insight, that one is not born a woman but rather becomes one, Butler (1990: 33) sees gender as process, as "a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate nor to end." For Butler, gender is always performative, more about doing than about being. It is a "kind of imitation for which there is no original" (Butler, 1990: 21). If the subject seems to have an identity it is only because reiteration "conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (Butler, 1993:12). For Butler gender identities are a fiction and the repetition of the same performance will give the impression that a coherent identity lies underneath this masquerade. Butler, however, does not consider that a self preexists the performance, as matter does not 'exist,' in and of itself, outside or beyond discourse (Fraser, 1999:111).

Importantly, Butler (1990:114) perceives sex as discursively constructed. Sex "imposes an artificial unity on an otherwise discontinuous set of attributes." In effect, hormones, genes and organ appearance might vary and not correspond to one another. In raising the question that sex is as culturally constructed as gender, Butler proposes that indeed sex was always already gender, so that the sex/gender distinction is no distinction at all (Salih, 2002: 49).

Performance theory points to certain elements on gender that I hope will illuminate important points I wish to consider. One is the idea of gender as an endless

process, with no real beginning nor end. Such working can be valid for other identities as well, where the subject is akin to movement, not as a free floating entity but constrained in its mutation since positioned within power. I also wish to view identity as a fiction since overall it reflects a hegemonic view of the self. As mentioned above, individual identity is one of the hegemonic concepts to prevail in Mexico City, especially among the middle-classes. However, other ways of viewing the self are not excluded throughout the thesis, as testimonies will permit to approach.

Despite these useful insights on the workings of gender, as Weston (1993) remarks there are certain limitations to Butler's performance theory. In discussing the changes that separate the butch/femme from the 1920s-1950s to the ones of the 1980s-1990s, Weston argues that performance theory would fail to indicate which phenomena are specific to butch/femme from each period:

The same idealism that makes performance theory so appealing, with its promise of personal/political empowerment, cannot explain what motivates a given presentation, why a person assembles one type of montage rather than another, how the content and significance of gendered presentations shift over time, or what a given presentation means to the women who engage in gendering (1993:13).

Performance theory does not explain how people experience and view their bodies and sexualities. In this spirit, Weston highlights that such a view does not permit one to historically locate and understand the changes that render certain performances possible. On this point I converge with Weston and many others who underline the importance of historicizing a certain performance. As Hennessey (1995: 150) puts it, historicizing requires identifying connections between various social life spheres on a number of different levels. Referring to Butler's work on drag, she suggests what a historicized analysis would be:

To historicize the meaning of drag among the urban middle-class in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century would be to link it as a discursive practice to the social

relations that make it possible and in so doing situate practices specific to a particular social formation in the United States within the larger frame of late capitalism's geopolitics and multinational economy (Hennessey 1995: 150)

As I will discuss throughout this work, social changes on different levels have affected the ways in which female same-sex sexuality is lived, perceived and practiced, today in Mexico City. Identities are constructed within this historical cultural, economic, and political context.

3.4 Sexuality and Same-sex Sexuality in Anthropology,

Providing a different argument than biological determinism and a moralizing discourse of the "normality" of heterosexuality, for the past 20 years, social constructionism has been one of the dominant paradigms in studies on sexuality. Constructionism highlights the impact of the cultural and social upon such domains as sexual patterns and desires (Blackwood and Wieringa 1999:8).

Ethnographic insights into the plasticity of sexuality were provided from the early days of anthropology. For example, Mead (1928) initiated her career with an ethnography detailing among other things, the sexual experiences of adolescent girls in the Samoas, or Malinowski discussed the sexuality of the Trobriands Islanders in a monograph entitled *The Sexual Life of Savage* (1929). Benedict (1939) and some of her students such as Landes (1940), also recorded data on homosexuality and transvestism. These studies (and subsequent ones) presented sexuality as culturally embedded in particular contexts and contributed to discrediting early medico-biological essentialism.

The work of Michel Foucault, also contributed to desessentializing views on sexuality. In the *History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault suggested that sexuality is

embedded in structures of domination and control. He suggested that sexuality is not a natural given but rather a historical construct. As he writes on sexuality:

It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of social controls and resistances are linked to one another in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power (1978: 105-106).

Foucault's work became extremely influential on sexuality studies, proposing a historically embedded view. One of his important contributions was to demonstrate how the modern perspective of homosexuality had been constructed in the European nineteenth century. His work underlined how certain sexual behaviors became the markers of one's whole identity as he pointed out:

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration, the homosexual was now a species (1978:43).

Foucault demonstrated how the perception of homosexuality as an identity was a historical construct that had been elaborated in the western world. Following this train of thought, Weeks (1981) made the important and useful distinction between homosexual behavior and homosexual identity.

During the 1970's radical feminism suggested that sexuality is defined by patriarchal institutions. Such theories also suggested a social construction of sexuality. They proposed that sexuality was the result of male domination, which defined and controlled women's sexuality (see Rubin 1975, MacKinnon 1979, Rich 1980).

Incorporating anthropology and radical feminism, Adrienne Rich (1980) argued that heterosexuality is a disempowering political institution for women. Rich gave multiple cross-cultural examples in which she highlighted the cultural constraints that have enforced heterosexual coupling throughout history. "Compulsory heterosexuality" had

been the means of assuring male rights and access to females' physical, economical and emotional aspects. Rich saw lesbianism as resisting patriarchy, she proposed a "lesbian continuum" that ranged from women's friendships to intimate relations. By the late 1970's and early 1980's the notions of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality as transhistorical were shaken by feminists who were called "libertarian" or "pro-sex", and who emphasized the potentially liberating aspects and pleasures of sexuality (Ferguson 1984, Philipson 1984 cited in Blackwood and Wieringa 1999: 10).

In anthropology, with the exception of very few studies it was not until the 1960's that studies on same-sex sexuality emerged. However, it was in the 1990's that the research on the topic flourished in the discipline, much later than was the case in other disciplines such as literary studies or history (Weston, 1998: 147). The study of homosexuality, in anthropology, grew slowly with the discipline following the flow of its condition in the Western world. For a long time, heterosexuality was perceived to be the universal norm that anthropologists could blindly assume, as Lewin points out:

The apparent inability of traditional anthropology to consider sexual variation as other than a bizarre curiosity speaks to the parallel phenomenon of a "heterosexual assumption" in Western societies, that is, the assumption that heterosexuality is natural and universal and requires neither explanation or theorizing (1995: 324).

Very little data was gathered before the gay and lesbian movement in the West. Having identified such invisibility in the anthropological record, after the 1960's many ethnographers concentrated their efforts on data-gathering, a process that Weston (1998:149) has labeled as a form of *ethnocartography*, which consisted in looking for evidence of same-sex sexuality in non- western societies. This research left aside the view of homosexuality as an individual pathology and redefined it on the bases of

cultural constructivism. This change permitted new ranks of anthropologists to explore the topic in a different light.

Introducing the theoretical perspective of constructivism meant that terms such as homosexual, lesbian or gay could not be applied cross-culturally as raw material. Those categories were socially constructed meanings, which reflected the impossibility of transposing them. As Blackwood and Wieringa write:

The implication of social construction theory is that persons who engage in same-sex behaviors outside the contemporary European and North American sociohistorical context do not have a gay or lesbian identity because those identities have particular meaning that is not shared in other cultures (1999:18).

Despite the critique of taking into account the context and meaning, and the variety of identities and perspectives, terms such as lesbian have been used in diverse settings. As Zimmerman and McNaron (1996) argue, it remains a meaningful political marker, that keeps its subject from becoming invisible. On the other hand, following the insights of social constructivism authors have opted not to translate local categories, constructing the meaning of the terms through the text. For example Wikan (1991) used the term *xanith* in her study of Oman rather than transvestite or transsexual. Local terms such as *mahu* (Elliston, 1999) in Tahiti, or *motsoalle* in Lesotho (Kendall, 1999) are attached to female same-sex sexuality, but their meanings differ radically since they have been constructed in such different contexts. The abandonment of sexology-inspired universals in favor of local terms, reflects the ongoing tension in anthropology between the search for unified versus particular explanations (Weston, 1998:159).

While the study of same-sex relations has been growing in anthropology, the study of female same-sex relations has remained limited. In effect, this lack of data has

been due to problems in collection and interpretation as well as to the silence of Western observers and scholars on the topic of female sexuality (Blackwood and Wieringa, 1999:39). Male social scientists who have investigated homosexuality cross-culturally, often left aside women's sexuality under the assumption that data on females was unavailable. Contrary to common belief, Blackwood (cited in Blackwood and Wieringa, 1999:49) conducted a survey of anthropological and historical texts (mostly in English) on lesbian relations and found evidence of female transgender and same-sex practice that exceeded previous estimates, locating ninety-five societies providing hints of forms of female same-sex sexuality. However, theoretical contributions such as typologies of homosexuality (see Greenberg 1988, Herdt 1988, William 1992) continued to emphasize only sexual activity between males. However, a variety of studies have emphasized that male same-sex sexuality is not the mirror of its female counterpart. Studies by authors such as Gay (1986) who studied the mummy-baby bond between women in Lesotho, Sankar (1986) who investigated Chinese sisterhoods, underlined the hazards of one-sided analysis. In effect, in the 1980's, such research on female same-sex sexuality highlighted the important relationship between gender and sexuality, emphasizing to which extent gender ideologies influenced the construction of women's sexuality. This contrasted with the spirit of the 1980's when many feminists, as discussed above, elaborated notions such as compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980), advocated that women's sexuality was exclusively produced by patriarchy. Recent studies on female same-sex sexuality have underscored instead women's agency in their sexuality. As Blackwood and Wieringa pointed out in their critique of such notions:

Heterosexual marriage may be the norm in all societies, and often constitutes the only avenue to adulthood, but sexuality does not equal marriage nor does marriage deny women's creation of or participation in other sexual practices, heterosexual and otherwise. It was not marriage

or heterosexuality that oppressed women or constrained their sexuality. The oppression of women's sexuality was located in particular systems in which masculinity and masculine desire were constructed as more valuable and powerful, while women's sexuality was seen as limited or necessarily confined (1999:55).

In many cases scholars perceive women's agency as an act of resistance, often as a direct response to the patriarchal order. For example, Sheperd (1987) argued in her study of Mombasa women that being a lesbian freed women from their obligations in a Muslim patriarchal society, which permitted them to resist constraints attached to their gender.

While studies on same-sex sexuality continue to emphasize that sexuality is deeply rooted in its context, researchers have increasingly taken into account the interfaces of the local and the global. In *Global Sex* (2001) Altman explores the globalization of lifestyles and identity politics. In this spirit, other authors have explored the new subject positions that individuals adopt in relation to new sexual economies. For example Elliston (1999) examines how categories from Western provenance exist in parallel with local categories allowing same-sex sexuality in Tahiti and how their social meaning differ. The diversification of categories on same-sex sexuality is a common phenomenon and is also taking place in Mexico, as we shall see.

3.5 Gender and Sexuality in Mexico

It remains evident, as most of the literature previously discussed has emphasized, that the exploration of the Mexican context is necessary for the development of this topic. Since the early decades of this century, Mexico has been one of the territories on which abundant amounts of information have been produced through the anthropological gaze. However, some topics have remained less studied as is the case of the themes of gender and sexuality. This relative absence of material increases in the case of the Mexican metropolis and its

surroundings. Most studies tend to concern economically disadvantaged classes and rural settings which leaves us with little information on middle and upper classes and urban environments.

Often the literature has tended to portray gender and sexuality issues under two poles following universalistic and particularistic debates. First, is the vision where most males are depicted as machos and most females as submissive. Most contributions prior to the 1980's perpetuated this vision as it was conventional in anthropology, but still today we can find examples of this vision (see Melhuus 1998). Second, is the deconstructionist position where these roles are dismissed (see Gutmann 1996).

Written when the universal view tended to be privileged, *The Children of Sanchez* (Lewis, 1961) is one of the foundational texts for anthropologists who are interested in Mexico City. In this ethnography Lewis discusses the life of a family in what he called the "culture of poverty"; information on gender relations can be found throughout the book. In effect, Lewis describes a universe where gender roles are strongly divided. As Levine and Correa describe in reference to Lewis' work:

Males were superior, females subordinate. Husbands dominated their wives and brothers their sisters. Typically fathers spent very little time with their children... Though family life was characterized by loyalty and concern for one another, at the same time, heavy drinking, male promiscuity and domestic violence were common place (1993:1).

This anthropological view of gender and sexual norms in the 1950's corresponded to the one elaborated by intellectual elites of the Mexican nation. Those perspectives went along with the search for the "Mexican Nation", articulating the idea of the *mestizo*. The most famous of those contributions has been the one of Octavio Paz's in his essay *El Laberinto de la Soledad* (1950) (The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico). This influential book constructed its theories on Freudian and Jungian analysis,

elaborating a Mexican archetype for the nation. For Paz, Mexicans were born (symbolically) from the union of the Spaniard conquistador Hernan Cortes and La Malinche- a Nahuatl woman who became mistress and translator for Hernan Cortes. As Jean Franco points out referring to Octavio Paz' work:

[Paz] argued that the Mexican male subject had been constituted as a violent rejection of his shameful mother. Dona Marina has become a figure that represents those Indian women who were fascinated, raped, or seduced by the Spaniards, and, just as the child cannot forgive the mother who leaves him to go in search of his father, the Mexican peoples cannot forgive the treason of La Malinche (1989: 131).

Like Eve, in the Christian pantheon, La Malinche is the female icon at the source of suffering in the Mexican Nation, therefore blaming the original sin on women as on natives and possibly confining them to similar categories. The Roman Catholic Church being highly influential in the country, Eve can be considered guilty of human misery as well, however Paz does not discuss Eve. According to Paz, Mexican women embody passivity, the violated and raped (native) woman; therefore the active and dominant male is the one who has to be valorized (Gutmann, 1992:53). Women are usually seen as deserving protection, as belonging to somebody, unless they show themselves as indecent women (Prieur, 1998:85).

Women's sexuality is a significant marker that will classify them in the classic virgin or whore position. Symbolically, La Malinche stands as a symbol for the "bad girl" but on the other hand, La Virgen de Guadalupe has the opposite meaning often evoking the pure woman. As La Malinche, the Virgin of Guadalupe constitutes a Mexican National symbol that has been an important part of Mexican Nationalism. As Wolf (1958) mentions, La Virgen represents hope, life and health, she is an important symbol that links together family, politics, religion, colonial past and independent present. She

appeared to the native man Juan Diego, identifying herself in Nahuatl. As in the first Mexican creation myth she embodies the idea of the *mestizo*. In effect, the indigenous population believed that the appearance of a Mexican Virgin Mary was the reincarnation of the Aztec goddess Tonantzin (Trujillo, 1998: 214). In her sacred nature, she is the syncretism of the Catholic and Mexica religions. Since her apparition in 1531, she evolved from being the protector against epidemics to the goddess of victory and liberty (Lafaye cited in Gutmann, 1992: 57). Today, "The feast day of Guadalupe, December 12... remains the central date in the emotional calendar of Mexican peoples" (Rowe and Schelling, 1993: 23). She is also known to represent salvation and motherhood. It has also been argued that La Virgen represents a feminine ideal which includes passivity, obedience, unswerving love and the capacity to endure suffering and pain (Yarbro-Bejarano, cited in Trujillo, 1998: 216).

To Melhuus (1998) Mexican femininity is anchored in this view and motherhood and suffering are the pillars of women experience. The real dilemma stands in the fact that in order to become a mother, women need to sacrifice their purity. Once they have children they are morally obliged to sacrifice themselves for their children.

Some scholars defend the idea that this capacity for suffering permits Mexican women to view themselves as superior to men. In effect, *marianismo*, a concept constructed to correspond to machismo, suggests that women are perceived to be semi-divine through their moral superiority, spiritual strength leading to a large capacity for humility and sacrifice (Stevens, 1973:94). In line with this idea, Adler-Lomnitz (1977:94) claims that Mexican women often regard men as emotionally immature, and do not get

very close to them, forming stronger bonds with their children and their own parents and siblings.

The tendency to perceive women as exclusively self sacrificing has progressively been debunked in the past few years. In an article referring to the Guatemalan highlands, Elhers (1991) argues that marianismo varies and differs in relation to class and personality. In this specific context, she presents it as a strategy for psychological survival that women need since they are excluded from income producing activity. Either in the case of marianismo or machismo we should recognize as Gutmann (1996:21) has pointed out “that there is always both acquiescence and dissension with regard to these concepts, and that no category is popularly regarded – or should be seen- as homogeneous.”

Without any doubt, the “Gender and Development” perspective is the one that has predominated in research regarding women in Mexico City. Even though these studies often tend to depict women as single faceted economic beings, they have contributed to presenting a picture of women as not entirely dispossessed of agency. As Levine, Correa and Uribe (1986:183) discuss, younger urban women controlling their reproductive lives, extending their formal education and aspiring to become economically self-reliant, challenge traditional notions of husband and wife relations “and refuse to endure infidelity, neglect, physical violence and other forms of abuse.” In this new millenium as much as in the past, motherhood and raising a family remains the most frequent option taken by a majority of Mexican women. Nonetheless, due to the economic crisis, women have joined the ranks of the workforce in Mexico. In *The Crossroads of Class and Gender: Industrial Homework, Subcontracting, and Household Dynamics in Mexico City*

(1987), Lourdes Benería and Martha Roldán explore women's lives, out of the traditional household space that is generally associated to them. Today, in Mexico City women are not to be exclusively related to the household for they are to be seen in the higher ranks of education, the workforce and in leisure spaces. However, it has been documented in diverse parts of Mexico that women's paid employment does not necessarily mean, a shift in gender roles at home (Beneria and Roldan 1987, Safa 1995, Howell 1999) Women are often expected to work and remain the primary household caretakers.

Masculinities and femininities do not coexist in separate spheres. In effect, as Melhuus (1998:376) discusses, masculinity is in part relative to a man's capacity to actively dominate his surroundings. This hunger for control is what Stevens (1973:90) has described, as machismo, "the cult of virility. The chief characteristics of this cult are exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male personal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships." However, once again male identities are not perceived as being homogeneous. According to Gutmann (1996: 25), the macho is a mythical figure, "there is continuous contest and confusion over what constitutes male identity; it means different things to different people at different times. And sometimes different things to the same person at the same time."

The recent literature on male same-sex relations in Latin America (Taylor 1986, Carrier 1995, Lumsden 1991 Lancaster 1992, Prieur 1998, Kulick 1997) has provided differently situated information on gender and sexuality. Most of those authors argue that the act of penetration is at the locus of gender construction, associating masculinity with the active penetrator and femininity with the passive penetrated. The act of being

penetrated reduces a man to a position that is less valued in the gender spectrum, towards the feminine pole. On the other hand, the penetrator accomplishes an act that is respected by his peers. As Lancaster (1988:113) explains, it can be compared to heavy-drinking or adultery behavior that is valued in male-male social relations.

While a man needs a woman or a man to affirm his masculinity, the *cochon* (Nicaragua) or the *jota* in Mexico needs the active man to create his identity. As Lancaster (1988: 114) phrases: "Machistas make *cochones* out of other men and each is necessary to the definition of the other in a dynamic sense that is very different from the way North American categories of the hetero- and homosexual define each other." In the North American system the homosexual status is relative to the sex of the person with whom sexual practices are accomplished, while in Latin America the stress is on the act itself, following the axes of penetration. Only the subjugated one pertains to a category that varies from the norm.

In her article, "Configuring Gender: Male and Female in Mexican Heterosexual and Homosexual Relations", Melhuus (1998), argues that gender in cross-sex relationships can be perceived as constructed along the dynamics of penetration as in same-sex (male) sexuality. Following the penetrated/penetrator dynamic, in traditional views of sexuality, females are the subjugated ones and males the dominant ones. As Kulick (1997) has suggested, gender in Latin America could be perceived as "men" and "not men", implying that penetrated women and men, share a gender. However, Melhuus contradicts this line of reasoning, specifying that men and women will not be confronted with the same consequences. In effect, they will be positioned in distinct conceptual categories: While men risk being categorized as more feminine (or less manly), women

risk losing their virgin reputation or gaining motherhood that will by contrast, valorize them if it takes place at the heart of the marriage institution. This last argument emphasizes that the formulation of gender through a penetrative sexuality does not entirely evacuate the significance of the sexed body since the consequences of being penetrated are different in relation to the sex of the individual. As Kulick (1998:236) mentions, due to a small amount of research it remains unclear "the extent to which women (both heterosexual and lesbian) perceive their bodies, desires, and identities to be implicated in a gendered framework that is grounded in penetrative sexuality".

In contrast to men, sexual activity for women outside the institution of marriage, transgresses (female) ideals of virginity before marriage and devotion to her husband and children after. Traditionally, and symbolically, the sexual woman embodies the *Malinche*, the "bad woman". In several studies women are depicted as uninterested in sexuality, because sexual conduct categorizes them in the virgin/whore binary. Stevens (1973) who first proposed the notion of *marianismo* in Latin America, points out that women refer to the sexual act as *le hicé el servicio* (I did him the favor). Recent Mexican studies on women's sexuality demonstrate that the rigid virgin/whore binary is not as important today in women's sexuality. In a study on three women generations Rivas Zivy (1998) found that grandmothers, and to a lesser degree mothers, perceived their sexuality according to the honor and shame ideals. In contrast, the younger generation, viewed sexuality as related to eroticism and pleasure. The virgin/whore binary remained present in their perspectives, but not as dominantly than in previous generations. The author attributed these changes to the context, in which various discourses on sexuality circulate.

Their grandmothers and mothers had mainly been influenced by the Roman Catholic discourse on sexuality, which views sexuality as procreative.

In *Virginidad e Iniciación Sexual en México* (2001), the Mexican sociologist Ana Amuchástegui also proposes that social and political changes in Mexico have modified sexual subjectivities. The author, conducted her study with men and women from three communities: a native, a rural and urban neighborhood. Similar to Rivas Zivy, cited above, Amuchástegui found the presence of Catholic ideals on sexuality, but that were often contradicted in the narration of practices and experiences. The participants in the study expressed contradictory ideas, but yet that coexisted in their sexual subjectivities.

While offering interesting information on women's sexuality in Mexico, a topic on which little has been written, these studies do not explore same-sex sexuality. Norma Mogrovejo (2000) discusses the topic of lesbianism, as identity politics, through her study on the lesbian movement in Mexico and other Latin American countries.

Nonetheless, the study mostly focuses on the political life and ideas of the movement, and on its relations with the feminist and homosexual movements. Susan Willman (2000), a legal practitioner also discusses lesbianism in Mexico. Willman writes about lesbian groups in Mexico and mainly presents the vision of Mogrovejo (cited above) and other activists in the movement. In a different style, Mogrovejo published in 2001 "Lestimonios: Voces de mujeres lebianas 1950-2000" (Les(bian)-testimonies: Lesbian Women Voices). This publication is a collection of poems, short stories and testimonies that were gathered by Mogrovejo during her fieldwork on the lesbian movement. As she explains, in earlier work she had focussed on activism, but she was left with an interesting amount of material on the intimate, familiar and personal aspects of lesbian

lives in Latin America, that she presents in "Lestimonios". Rather than theorizing the lives of these women, in this piece of work Mogrovejo gives place to their voices.

A body of literature concerning Chicana lesbians in the United States is available and might provide interesting insights (see Anzaldua 1987, Trujillo 1991, Perez 1993,1994), but the context is too different to only concentrate on this literature. Research on female same-sex sexuality in Mexico, is imperative to understand gender and sexuality in Mexico from a differently embedded location, and to correct the representational absence that has predominated.

Chapter 4: From Past to Present

It is Thursday night and I am sitting with a couple of friends in a crowded woman's cafe. In fact, I only know Matilda, 30 year old, who dedicates herself to politics and her sister Gabriela 27 year old, who works as an administrative assistant. They introduce me to some of their friends: Alejandra a 29 year old medical doctor and her date Fabiola whom she met over the internet couple of days before. That night we discuss that there is more acceptance toward the issue of same-sex sexuality in Mexico than there has been in the past. In the course of the conversation I ask my friends if I can record the dialogue.

Gabriela : ... *And my uncles they said "Putos, maricones" Do you know what my Grandmother told them ? " You shut up and respect!" My grandmother!*

Alejandra: *But there are modern grandmothers.*

Gabriela: *Imagine that a grandmother of 86 years old tells you that when she was born in the 1900's! My grandmother was like this so it's not the time but the education you receive.*

Matilda: *But what really happens is that now there is more information.*

Alejandra: *Yes and before they thought it was a sickness, didn't they?*

Fabiola: *Or that it was a divine punishment or that you had been raped.*

Alejandra: *But also because there was no scientific research and now there is. And now you can know because of the genes and a lot of other things. And also what happens is that we did not go out to the streets. I mean it was more like the weird unmarried uncle or aunt. But they never opened themselves and said, you know what, it's because I am gay...When did you see a movie or a video back then ? But if you go to the USA you see people kissing on the mouth and you say Oh! However, our culture is not that open. I mean, maybe you don't see it wrong and you say "great." But the majority of people here tell you "How can they be kissing?" Perhaps you won't say anything because you have other ideas but people that are*

going to see us will say “ Pinches lesbianas!”

Gabriela: That’s what it is the culture that we have is not that open. The education that is given in schools, in your house, in society is not as open as it should be.

Fabiola: It is not that it isn’t large. It is only that we don’t respect each other.

Alejandra: It is our culture, our culture.

Matilda: Religion, religion.

Alejandra: In Mexico it hasn’t permitted an opening.

Gabriela: But there are other things, I mean...

At the beginning of the conversations my friends debate the changes that permit greater societal acceptance of same-sex sexuality. Matilda and Alejandra invoke the work of the LGBT movement, including their increasing presence in the media. Gabriela highlights the importance of education, and Alejandra names a “scientific research” which produces new ideas and render same-sex sexuality more acceptable. Those changes have taken over ideas that were prevalent in the past. As Alejandra mentions “they thought it was a sickness”, pointing out the medical model of homosexuality. In mentioning “divine punishment”, Fabiola also implicates the decreasing force of the Catholic view over sexuality. Nevertheless, in comparing the acceptance of same-sex sexuality with their Northern neighbors, the four women believe that changes are still required in the country and discrimination against themselves remains present. They perceive their culture, and Fabiola names more precisely religion, as an obstacle for change.

As this discussion illustrates, past hegemonic ideals are now competing with other ideas, leading to a production of new meanings regarding same-sex sexuality. Women identify several social actors that have sown new ideas, revealing a complex context of

competing forces. While the talk here concerns more precisely same-sex sexuality, in Mexico ideas on gender and sexuality as a whole have undergone profound changes in the past decades (Amúchastegui, 2001).

The fact that an increasing number of women are open in front of society about practicing same-sex sexuality and/or are presenting lesbian or bisexual identities, is undoubtedly related to the introduction of competing voices that have challenged the traditional Catholic ideals on sexuality. As di Leonardo and Lancaster (1997:1) remark sexual practices and their mental construction of erotic desire “have never sprung into being *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Metamorphoses in sexual and gender relations have always been inseparably linked to political, economic, and cultural changes.” Female same-sex sexuality, can only be understood as embedded in this cultural context.

In this chapter, I intend to present the field of ideas on gender and sexuality in Mexico City, mainly focussing on new meanings that the concepts of woman, sexuality and same-sex sexuality have recently acquired. These ideas are historically located in order to understand the context in which female same-sex sexuality and women's sexual subjectivities are constructed. I first explore the economic and cultural changes that have transformed what it means to be a woman today in Mexico City. I then explore the ideas on sexuality that circulate in Mexico City. In the final section, I look more precisely at the ideas and history of the lesbian and sexual diversity movement, which profoundly contribute to the meanings attributed to female same-sex sexuality in Mexico City.

4.1 Housewives, Mothers and Executives

They might get married but society is not pressuring them anymore to get married. Now it is not perceived as really strange for a woman not to marry ...I am saying that maybe some find it weird but that's another story, in general women have more liberty. In fact, I believe that right now we are expecting too much from women, for her to be an executive and at the same time a housewife and lalala, and prepared and knowledgeable, we are expecting too much.

-Valeria

Once in a while, I had lunch with my grandmother at a nearby restaurant from her house. Talking about the past and the present of the city I often felt that her personal story reflected the changes that had occurred to the megalopolis that was once a town in a gigantic valley. Like many other migrants, my grandmother came with her husband to Mexico City in the 1940s. It is during that period that the process of urbanization started. She particularly remembers the house where my mother grew up. Back then, *Barranca del Muerto*, located at the outskirts of the city, was covered in grass and trees. A landscape that is difficult to imagine when today tall apartment blocks are to be seen in this space. In the 1980s, my grandmother moved to a gated neighborhood around *Ciudad Universitaria*. The tall walls erected around the guarded neighborhood were there to protect the residents from crime, traffic and pollution that had become far too common in the city. A wall that also captured the deep social class cleavage. By that time the country had a new face, it had become two third urban. My grandmother, a housewife since she was 18, always says she married too young. In contrast, to her, my mother and her sisters pursued their studies, have professional careers and married later. Studying medicine in

the 1960s, my mother chose a non traditional career for women in Mexico: she was the only woman in her graduation picture.

Among my friends in Mexico, I am not the only one who grew up with working parents. Some of them, like Andrea, have a mother who chose to work. However, many like Xia, saw their mothers join the work force because there was no other choice. In effect, during the economic crisis in the 1980s many women started working. The crisis strongly related to the falling oil prices, and the accelerated inflation aggravated the foreign debt problems. For people this meant developing survival strategies, among them, wives entering the workforce. Families had scarce choices. For the working classes this could mean being unable to pay the rent. For middle-class families the threat was high since it could imply entering a less privileged class. Traditional middle-class values prevented those families from making the choice of lowering their status and many women had to enter the workforce (Hubbell 1993). At the end of the 1990's, in the Federal District, women made up to 40% of the workforce, (La Botz 1999:5). For most families this remains a necessity since the economic situation has not improved but worsened. Since 1976, four currency devaluation, restraining savings, have taken place. Between 1976 and 1997 purchasing power diminished by 71,4%. During the same period prices increased up to 102, 77% and the minimum wage only increased by 29,369% (Vásquez 1997). The forced entrance of housewives into the workforce is certainly one of the important social changes that has come to modify gender identities in Mexico City.

Another influential change to women's situation is the level of education that particularly urban women have acquired. Today about two thirds of women have attended primary and secondary school, though they may not have graduated and about

14.6 percent of women have college or post-graduate education (La Botz, 1999:3). A greater enrollment in education took place in the 1970's when oil and natural gas reserves were discovered which permitted the government to invest in education. However, it was not until the 1980's that girls began to attend junior high school in the same proportions as boys (UNESCO, 1991: 167). In her study on working class women in Cuernavaca, Levine (1993:196) argues that educated women will develop a stronger self-confidence since, as students, girls are expected to apply themselves for their own benefits and in this environment a girl can beat out the boys for first place. Education has in fact been identified as a key element contributing to change gender roles (United Nation, 1995). Women with more schooling are found to have more choice about who they will marry (Elhers, 1991). They are more likely to separate or divorce than uneducated women (Levine, Correa and Uribe, 1986) and are found to have more control over the practice of their own sexuality (Figueroa Perea and Rivera Reyes, 1993).

The image of the educated working woman in Latin America is relatively new in the anthropological literature. In previous decades, they were represented as dominated by men, submissive and self-sacrificing daughters, wives or mothers (see Lewis 1961, Stevens 1973, Elmendorf 1977). Such representations have been regarded as picturing gender identities as monolithic objects. In recent years, the idea of subjects undergoing constant transition has been privileged (see Browner 1986, Levine Correa and Uribe 1986, Hubell 1993, Gutmann 1996). This shift of perception might be due in part to a change in anthropological writing that favored in the past the universal view over the particularistic one. Nevertheless, after the rise of the feminist and LGBT movement; and

profound economic changes that have sent women to work and ranks of education, gender and sexuality can only have been affected by those important transformations.

4.2 Contemporary Sexualities

In Mexico, it has been documented that the main socially accepted sexuality for women is the one that takes place at the heart of marriage and with procreative objectives (Liguori 1995, Rodriguez and *al* 1995, Amuchástegui 1994, Amuchástegui and Rivas 1995 cited in Szasz 1998). Analyzing the narratives of women whom I observed and interviewed, it is difficult to identify this perspective of sexuality in their words. Listening to women who are not involved in same-sex sexuality, it becomes clear that this transformation of ideas is not only related to a same-sex preference. Whereas in the past centuries sexuality has been largely defined by Catholic ideals, today these coexist with other notions promoted by schools, the media, governmental campaigns on health and population, feminist and LGBT movements (Amuchástegui 2001). Those producers of meaning emit competing notions on sexuality that are appropriated, resisted or recreated by subjects.

As Rivas Zivy (1998) demonstrates in a study she conducted on three generations of women, grandmothers clearly express themselves within the Catholic ideals on sexuality, a tendency that slightly decreases with the mothers she interviewed. The most important changes are observed among the granddaughters as Rivas Zivy (1998:144) expresses: "They have lived in a complex social panorama where diverse and contradictory tendencies coexist." Rivas Zivy suggests that Catholic ideals on sexuality remain in action but this time coexisting with other voices such as the one of the LGBT

movement for example, where same-sex sexuality is not regarded as sinful or immoral; or voices in the media where sexuality is presented as pleasurable. Rivas Zyvi and

Amuchástegui explain the effects of this dispersion of power centers on the subjects:

In a way, family and the Catholic Church have diminished their power and they share their position with other institutions as health institutions, schools, work, fashion, publicity, sports etc. This dispersion of power such as which intervenes in the construction of sexual models and values has clear effects, not only in the discourses emitted by institutions, but on the experience and identity of sexual subjects...(1998:22; translation by me)

In order, to understand the different ideas that are appropriated, resisted or reinterpreted by individuals, it is necessary to provide an overview of diverse social actors and their ideas. As Amuchástegui (2001) suggests those include the Catholic Church, Right wing groups, governmental campaigns, feminist and LGBT groups and different voices in the media. These producers of meaning are of course not uniform, as different people work and participate in them, nonetheless, a tendency that I describe here can be drawn.

Since the arrival of Spaniards in the XVI century Catholic ideas on sexuality have predominated. Until this day, most Catholic ideals have remained such as the emphasis on reproduction, motherhood, monogamy, the importance of virginity for women and the condemnation of same-sex sexuality. Women's sexual behavior is judged under the virgin/whore binary which classifies them as good or bad women.

Today most of those ideals persist but they are secularized, since they have been divided from their religious origin and reconstructed as a secular moral system (Amuchástegui and Rivas Zivy 1999, Amuchástegui 2001). This process has in fact been taking place since the beginning of the XIX century when the legal division between the Church and the State took place. This does not mean that the Catholic

Church is unimportant in the country. In fact, most Mexicans claim to be Catholic and some rituals continue to be important, as most children are baptized and people still marry religiously.

The Catholic views on sexuality are also largely disseminated by many conservative groups. More than a hundred of those pressure groups can be identified in Mexico (Gonzales, 1994). The PAN, the national party now in power, is also known to have close affiliations with those conservative groups.

Only recently the government has accorded more attention to the topic of sexuality. This sudden concern is more related to population control and health prevention. This interest was first expressed in the 1970's when the economic situation began to deteriorate and there was an inability to absorb a rapidly expanding work force. The General Law of Population that created CONAPO (Consejo Nacional de Población) was sponsored by the government in 1974. This had for effect that in the following years birth-control services were offered for the general population through health institutions across the country. With this law, sex education was also made mandatory beginning in the sixth grade (CONAPO, 1979). Until this day, sexuality is often addressed in a biological perspective, anchored in a heterosexual vision of sexuality. There are reasons to believe that government policies have been effective in that area since the number average of children each woman bore declined from six in 1975 to four in 1985 and three by 1995. Birth-control methods have increasingly been part of women's sexuality, particularly in Mexico City where in 1996 42,1% had been sterilized, 24,1% used IUD and 11,6% used the pill (INEGI 1996 cited in Amuchátegui 2001: 243).

Recently, the government has also given particular attention to sexuality due to the AIDS epidemic. As in most Western countries, the first cases were identified in the early 1980's among homosexual males but quickly progressed to all population sectors. In 1985 the *Comite para la prevencion y el control del SIDA* (AIDS prevention and control committee) was created which later became CONASIDA. Throughout its history the organization has found strong opponents in conservative groups and the Catholic Church. Consequently, recent campaigns have been perceived to be less explicit and direct than initial ones (Rico Galindo, Bronfman and del Rio Chiriboga, 1995).

Governmental concern for those issues have often taken place under the pressure of certain population sectors. Since the 1970's, feminist groups have debated sexual and reproductive health, pressing the government to discuss these themes. Recently, they have also urged them to include themes such as sexual rights, gender relations, STDs , sexual education and abortion. Many LGBT groups have also pressured the government on similar issues and have specially taken part in AIDS prevention.

While the Catholic Church, Right wing groups and the government have access to television, radio and the press to publicize their ideas. The media has often emphasized the aspect of pleasure in sexuality. As Monsivaís argues in an interview to *Letra S*, a monthly publication, Mexican television abandoned its “televisual chastity” at the moment where the electronic medium realized that it was more expensive to present chaste images than to show them on TV (Brito and Medina, 2000). However, this

pleasure is often presented as careless and in many cases such as in video clips, objectifying women. Some educational programs present a different facet, such as *Dialogos en Confianza* (Dialogues in confidence) on channel 11, or *Desnudo Total* on the radio which discuss sexuality issues openly. Those are some of the few spaces where sexuality is not only presented in relation to the reproductive function of married individuals but touches issues such as pleasure, personal growth, health and interpersonal communication. Those informative programs are almost the only spaces where LGBT issues are addressed positively. Discriminative or stereotypical representations broadcast as in the case of reality shows seem unfortunately to be more common. Some Mexican *telenovelas* (soap operas) have included gay secondary characters but to my knowledge no lesbians. North American shows with gay and lesbian characters such as “Will and Grace” or “Ellen” are also presented on the cable. The introduction of those shows on Mexican screens, certainly speaks of the work of the LGBT movement in these past decades which has influenced ways of thinking on gender and sexuality in Mexico City.

4.3 From Compadres and Fems to Lesbianas?

The invention of the notion of homosexuality as it emerged in the European medical/scientific discourse has been documented by many writers (see Foucault 1978, Halperin 1990, Katz 1995). In Mexico, such notion was available since the late nineteenth century and twentieth century when Porfirian criminologists studied homosexuality among prison inmates (Buffington, 1997). However, it remains unclear if such a conceptualization of same-sex sexuality was used outside of educated elite circles. The Western notion of homosexuality seems to have entered Mexico in larger proportions

with the rise of the LGBT movements that emerged in the 1970's. The notion of sexual identity did not entirely replace previous meanings attached to male same-sex sexuality since recent studies in Mexico tend to indicate that those relations are seen through the active/passive binary (Taylor 1986, Lumsden 1991, Carrier 1996, Prieur 1998). The act of penetration constructs the penetrator as the active and masculine figure that is socially valued while the penetrated is the passive, feminine and discriminated partner.

In the case of female same-sex sexuality, it is not really clear which notions were in action before the 1970s in Mexico City. If so little information can be found on female same-sex sexuality in Latin America, one has to dig even deeper to find any traces on how it was viewed before the arrival of the lesbian movement in the 1970's. One of the few pieces of the puzzle can be located in a collection of story-telling where Mogrovejo (2001:103) presents the testimony of a woman who practiced same-sex sexuality before and during the 70s in Mexico City, in a story called *Las prefiero Fem* (I prefer them fem). The narrator, who is not named, describes a universe made of *compadres* and *fems*. *Compadres* in this context seems to have a similar meaning to butch, but the term originally means the godfather of a child or can also be applied to good male friends. *Fem* appears to have been directly borrowed from English. Butch and femme identities originated in the USA in the early part of the twentieth century. Butch generally stands for a masculine in appearance and action partner, and femme for a feminine in appearance and action woman. (See Nestle 1992). Nonetheless, butch and femmes and *compadres* and *fems* cannot be the exact mirror of one another since their identities are developed in different cultural contexts. The narrator also does not speak of a specific space of reunion more than house parties where *compadres* and *fems* meet each other. It

is however not impossible that *compadre-fem* spaces were in place but that the narrator does not mention them.

With the arrival of the lesbian movement we can read in the words of the protagonist, a *compadre*, the introduction of a new set of ideas where female same-sex sexuality does not necessarily takes place in a *compadre/fem* dyad. This is clearly illustrated when she describes going to a party organized by Lambda, a gay and lesbian organization, where women do not respond to the same binary she is used to. The narrator says:

I used to lose my mind for women that caught my attention, but here they were university girls, with mountain boots, without care for their nails or make up, really unisex, it was terrible, disappointing. I was going for something else, I preferred them fem. I went to the party drunk and Alma started talking about sexual roles, horror! About machos! Then she gets on stage, calls me up and says to everyone "This is the example of what you should not do. I was dying of laughter because I understood what they were into, it was perfect. I was the ideal example so I went on stage. Since I was there as an example I started acting and embellishing my marimacha gestures and attitude... (Narrator in Mogrovejo, 2001:113).

This description strongly resembles a parallel phenomenon where butch-femme cultures were progressively effaced with the rise of lesbian feminism in North America (see Case, 1993). However, one should not be surprised by this knowing that the Mexican lesbian movement entertained many connections with Europe and North America from its beginning. It is however difficult to read from one narrative how much lesbian feminism came to affect the *compadre/fem* concept of female same-sex sexuality, or if this concept is similar to the active/passive binary found today in male same-sex sexuality; and how common were in fact *compadres* and *fems*.

The first openly gay and lesbian groups surged at the beginning of the 1970's. The ground had been opened by the 1968 student movement which was protesting against the

authoritarian administration of Diaz Ordaz and the use of public resources for the 1968 Olympic games. Until then, the PRI had only been concerned by the opposition of established factions. Those events gave rise to newest Mexican social movements such as the urban popular, the feminist and the gay and lesbian movement.

According to Lumsden (1991), the first organization, the *Mexican Homosexual Liberation Front*, was formed in 1971 by a group of students and artists that had taken part in the youth movement of 1968. Even though homosexuality was not criminalized, the initial years were lived in the fear of repression. Different groups were formed such as the *FHAR* (Frente Homosexual de Accion Revolucionaria), mostly composed of men, had members that identified with socialism and anarchism. *Grupo Lambda*, emerged during the same period. It was composed of gays and lesbians and is known to have introduced gay rights in the platform of the Left. Alliances with the PRT party were made, an association that would only last until the mid 1980's when the movement collapsed and continued along separate agendas. As Lumsden explains:

The explicit identification of socialism with homosexual liberation tended to alienate the majority of their immediate supporters, for they were mostly middle class and did not share their political perspective....More to the point, its breakup was related to its demonstrated inability to devise concrete responses to the oppression experienced by gays and lesbians in their every day life." (1991:64)

The first Lesbian organization in Mexico, was created a little bit before this period, in 1977, under the name of *Lesbos*. The Lesbian movement in itself had a slightly different trajectory. In her analysis on the lesbian movement in Mexico and Latin America, Mogrovejo identifies three main phases, which are tightly woven with the feminist and the male homosexual movements:

The first is that of equality and universality in which the movement identified itself with the social struggles the left was engaged in at the time. The lesbian of the homosexual movement recognized in these feminist demands a source of strength. They brought the issue of gender to the homosexual arena. In the second historical phase represented by the ideas of difference and separatism, the reaffirmation of lesbian

identity was rooted in the rejection of the masculine symbolic order, phallocentrism, and the heterosexual exclusiveness of the demands of the feminist movement. In the third phase in contrast to the feminist movement, the lesbian movement- due to its separatist tendencies- did not open new forms of interrelation with gay men and masculinity. The separation from the homosexual movement was radical. As the latter was greatly affected by AIDS by the mid-1980s on, it channeled much of its energy to fighting this disease. (Mogrovejo, 1999:324).

Today, as it has been in the past, it would be difficult to speak of one Lesbian movement, instead there are several Lesbian organizations which do not always take similar directions. During fieldwork I visited several Lesbian groups, such as Closet de Sor Juana, Lesbianas en Colectiva, Nueva Generación de Jóvenes Lesbianas, Las Amantes de la Luna and Musas de Metal. While several independent lesbian organizations exist in Mexico City, their separation from other networks does not always seem to be as radical, as Mogrovejo describes above in the third phase. Lesbian groups remain independent, but many of them entertain cooperative relations with other minority groups. For example, under the banner of CODISEX, many gay, lesbian, transgender, transsexual and women organizations regroup themselves as groups of the *diversidad sexual* (sexual diversity). This group organizes the annual parade of the *diversidad sexual* communities, but also works at the defense of human rights in the field of gender and sexuality issues.

One of the main disagreements among lesbian organizations, resides in the different strategies that are employed in the movement. Some groups work including authorities in power, such as in inviting members of the government to talk about a theme related to same-sex sexuality in activities they organize. This type of strategy also includes taking part in political parties already in place. In 1997, Patria Jimenez, the head of the lesbian organization, El Closet de Sor Juana, became part of Mexico's chamber of deputies. Her election marked a major statement from the PRD. In effect, Mexico has a

proportional voting system in which each party holds a number of seats in the legislature proportional to the percentage of the popular vote it receives. With this move, the party identified itself with the struggle to win acceptance of marginalized sexualities (Reding, 1997). Other groups, however refuse to incorporate any authorities in their plan as they feel they are already discriminated by them. How can they include the oppressor ?

Members of the movement have organized national encounters since the 1980s. They have also participated in international events such as the Lesbian Feminist encounters of Latin America and the Caribbean and the Fourth UN Women's Conference in Beijing. Most activist groups are part of gay and lesbian international organizations. The majority pertain to the international gay and lesbian association ILGA where as Musas de Metal works with International Amnesty.

In the opinion of many, it is in the past decade that the movement has found more strength and gained a voice in Mexico. A young lesbian activist from Closet de Sor Juana speaks of the important achievements:

I believe that in these past five years, the movement has strengthened the most. Patria Jimenez was there as a deputy. They removed article 201 on minor corruption and on the 281, we incorporated sexual orientation not to be discriminated, and last year and this one they opened programs on sexual diversity that I never had heard of five years ago. So I believe that it has been in the past five or six years.

Article 201 of the penal code dictated a prison sentence of six months to five years for anyone "who facilitates or procures the corruption of a minor under 18 years of age" it increased to five to ten years if the youth was led to engage a "homosexual practice". This article was modified in 1999, substituting "homosexual practices" for "sexual practices". Also since 1999, the article 281 of the penal code states that no person

can be "molested, discriminated or stigmatized for their sex, age, sexual orientation, race, skin color, language, religion, opinions, social condition, nationality, membership to a native group or an ethnic minority." The introduction of "sexual orientation" in the article 281 has led the attorney's office to create a program addressed to people with a sexual preference different to the heterosexual one. This program receives the complaints and provides orientation to any person who requests it. When I visited one of the administrators of the programs, no reports or statistics were yet available to know how well the program functioned. Other programs include services such as phone lines for psychological support, health clinics, radio programs, library and orientation services. These ones are mostly initiated by different LGBT groups, but in some cases sponsored by city government funds or other public institutions. Private, national and international sources also sponsor programs.

While these changes named above are concrete, the most important achievement is certainly, to have spread new ideas on sexuality. As Mogrovejo (1999:330) points out, the introduction of the lesbian movement in Mexico's political and cultural life "gave rise to a counterargument that opposed the images and characterizations presented by the tabloid press, traditional psychiatry, psychoanalysis, medicine, law, and religious morality." This allowed thousands of people to develop a sense of security and pride in their own sexuality.

Even though the movement has certainly changed perspectives towards same-sex sexualities, discrimination based on sexual identity remains the reality of many. During the interviews, some women speak of the difficulties they have living openly their sexual

preference today. Same-sex sexuality is openly lived in certain spaces such as in bars, cafes and groups. However, as Xia says: "If you go to a heterosexual place, there are places that are ok, but there are others where they'll tell you: "Here is your bill." Among interviewees, the majority said they would kiss their partner on the street, including in their neighborhood. In practice, nevertheless, not all women were willing to demonstrate romantic affection in public, particularly at work or in front of their families.

If most women mention that it is not always easy to live their sexual preference in Mexico, most of them voice that it must have been harder ten years ago. Paula expresses why she believes the situation to be easier now:

Paula: I believe that it is easier because ten years ago there were no spaces. There were police raids and they took them out of where they were. People did not express themselves as much in protests. Now if there is a discrimination problem (lgbt) groups are there defending human rights. In laws it is said that they cannot discriminate against you for your sexual orientation. Even though there is still a need to diffuse information and there is still discrimination, I believe that it is easier to live it. The government makes reference to the fact that no one should be discriminated against, there should be respect. The human rights commission and the attorney's office[also do]. There are programs that are in place, feminist groups speak of sexual rights and sexual respect. I think that it is easier to live it but there is still a lot of work to do, mainly with people.

Paula mentions some of the voices that are in action, counterbalancing more repressive ones such as certain sectors of the Catholic church or Right wing pressure groups. These voices have permitted changes in the past decade.

Tia (aunt) who is in her fifties definitively has the same opinion. She has been visiting the *ambiente* for fifteen years now. When I asked her what she thought had changed in these years, she suggested that spaces of the *ambiente* were much more secret before. In her opinion, now everybody knows where to find queer bars in the city. She also commented that she was surprised to see fifteen years old girls kissing on the streets.

“I would never have imagined it before.”, she said. Tia's testimony suggests that changes have occurred in the past decades.

4.4 Conclusion

The arrival of the lesbian movement in the 1970's certainly came to change female same-sex sexuality in Mexico City. Through its political work it rendered female same-sex sexuality more acceptable. In addition, it recognized some sexual subjectivity to women. For many centuries Roman Catholic ideals had predominated considering sexuality as sinful, and for reproductive purposes. In the past decades, ideas produced by governmental programs, the feminist and the sexual diversity movement, or depicted in the media, and the multiple economic transformations, largely influenced the meanings of sexuality.

Through this new amalgam of meanings, women's sexuality is still often perceived through the virgin/whore binary but it contradictorily, or intriguingly, intersects with new notions such as the ones of pleasure, sexual knowledge and rights over one own's body. Sexuality becomes not exclusively associated with the male body. It explores different routes where desire can be conceived as originating in the female body, without exclusively holding an immoral connotation. The few available studies on younger women's sexuality in Mexico (Rivas Zivy, 1998; Amuchástegui 2001) underline how interviewee's answers are often contradictory, reflecting the complex social landscape. Those changes are also to be perceived hand in hand with women's new social and cultural position. The entrance of women in the ranks of education and in the workforce, and the work of the feminist and LGBT movement, have contributed to

modify what it means to be a woman today in Mexico City. These recent transformations make it possible to locate female same-sex sexuality in the "visible" part of the social and cultural map of sexuality. As some women pointed out, homophobia is still a reality in the life of many, but the context is more permissive in comparison to ten years ago.

Chapter 5: Sexual and Gendered Self-Representations

In June 2000, I took part in the *diversidad sexual* (sexual diversity) pride march in Mexico City. For this event twenty five thousand people walked down Reforma avenue to the *Zocaló*, the center of the city. As I had recently arrived in the city, I expected to walk the parade by myself. Waiting for the march to start, I sat on a large block of cement. A woman dressed in black stood next to me. I examined her nails painted in black, which matched her pants and leather coat. She strangely reminded me of Janis, a good friend of my girlfriend at the time. Because of this resemblance, I let these apparently meaningless words come out of me and I asked: "Doesn't it start at four?" "I believe so", responded the stranger. Her name was Xia. She was the first person I met, and also one of the rare friends I would continue seeing on regular bases during 2001. Xia anxiously informed me that she was waiting for some friends, but she could not find them. Once the event started, Xia and I climbed on the many statues bordering Reforma, to spot her friends. Two teenage girls holding hands, a woman with salt and pepper hair shouting slogans, "bear" men with their mustaches and leather clothes, a drag queen dressed as cat woman for the occasion, young men and women holding the banner *Jovenes de Nezahualcoyotl*; represents the diversity of people taking part in this event. How would we find Sabina and Diana in this multitude? Perched at the top of Cuahquemoc figure (A Nahuatl emperor), Xia finally identified her friends. Sabina and Diana, were dancing next to a loud speaker, hanging at the top of a truck. As soon as Sabina saw Xia, she jumped at her neck and lifted her up. We quickly moved to a quieter spot of the parade, as Sabina had many stories to tell since she had just came back from Oregon, where she lived for a year.

One of the first questions Diana addressed to me was: "*Eres gay?*" (Are you gay) A couple of hours later when I discussed with Sabina, the same question was rephrased to me. These words intrigued me, particularly their official formulation. I knew that some women identified as lesbians (or *gay*) in Mexico, but I had rather prepared myself to hear of new terms, remote from these sexual identity categories. I was prepared not to commit the errors of attributing an identity constructed in the West, when same-sex sexuality might have been distinctly conceptualized in the context.

Studies on male same-sex sexuality in Mexico, posit the idea that same-sex relations are inscribed in a different sexual system than in North America. In the West, the homosexual status is relative to the object choice, in this case, the sex of the person with whom sexual practices take place. In Latin America, the stress is on the practice, following the axis of penetration and only placing the passive partner in a stigmatized position. Nevertheless, the idea of a homosexual identity is not completely absent in Mexico. Homosexual identity and the active/passive binary are therefore two of the dominant ideas on male same-sex sexuality. Subjects position themselves, appropriating, resisting and/or restructuring these ideas. These notions on same-sex sexuality often intermingle, and are not always exclusive to one another. In the case of Brazil, where these two ideas on same-sex sexuality are as well present, Parker (1999) describes them to be intertwined:

In the flow of daily life, in the lived experience of ordinary people, they tend to merge and interpenetrate in more or less confusing and often fragmentary, yet also fascinating ways- much like the image of the changing kaleidoscope, simultaneously bringing together elements of continuity and historical transformations, old practices and new configurations, constant forms and changing patterns. (1999:50).

As discussed in the previous chapter many ideas on sexuality which appeared in the last decades, also come into play affecting identities, desires and practices. If an

abundant literature has been produced in relation to male same-sex sexuality, not much is known about female same-sex sexuality in Latin America. It would be inaccurate to assume that female homosexuality is simply the mirror of the male experience. As Blackwood (1986:6) emphasizes, it is important to make a distinction in relation to gender since "a one-sided discourse on homosexuality does not adequately comprehend the complex interplay of factors which shape homosexual behavior, male or female".

When I genuinely answered "yes" to Sabina, what did I really mean and what did this really mean to Sabina? After all, very little is known on women's sexual identities in Mexico City and as Judith Butler (1991:16) asks: "so we are out of the closet, but into what?" Even though Sabina proposed a simple yes/no question, chances were that what it means to be *gay* in Mexico City, differed from what I had experienced. Chances were as well, that my simple "yes" did not exactly mean the same for each of my new friends.

In order to understand how the subjectivities of females practicing same-sex sexuality are positioned in relation to dominant ideas, I will first explore the ways in which these women self represent themselves. This, in relation to sexuality, in a cultural context where the homosexual/heterosexual binary and the active/passive one dominate, shape sexual selves and the meanings given to female same-sex sexuality. And conserving the vision that selves are not unitary masses but multilayered, it is also important to examine which other axis, interact with sexual and gendered social categories? Particularly the one of class, which is considered as an important marker to locate people.

I will then first present the notions of the passive/active binary starting from studies on male same-sex sexuality, and then presenting the voices of women on this

notion. Secondly, I will discuss the meanings attached to sexual identity in Mexico City in a similar fashion. To conclude I will examine through an interview, how these, often divergent ideas, operate and intermingle, and are appropriated, rejected and/or recreated by the subject in daily life.

5.1 Passive Female Subjectivities

One of the first questions I explored when I arrived in Mexico was the idea of the active/passive binary in Mexico City. Inspired by numerous studies, on male same-sex sexuality and some on cross-sex sexuality studies where the passive/active dynamic is described, I expected to encounter it in people's conversations and practices. Nevertheless, I was to find a limited number of hints of this construction in female same-sex sexuality. Perhaps I had not, as Cecilia McCallum (1998:277) advises; approached these analyses carefully enough since they are mainly based on a male perspective. Women's subjectivities on their own sexualities generally remain absent in these studies.

The active/passive binary, which constitutes a dominant idea, is in effect rooted in the perspective of the male body and penetrative sexuality. The penetrator asserts its manliness, penetrating other female or male bodies. The biological sex of the penetrated self, is rendered secondary (Amalguer 1993:257). What counts is the role taken in the sexual act. While males are classified as men and not men, such gender classification assumes that females remain women (or not men). As Kulick (1998) proposes, in his study on Brazilian *travesti* prostitutes, women, travestis and *viados* (passive homosexuals) share a gender because they share a desire for real men (penetrators) and are capable of arousing desire in them.

The fact that they are perceived as unable to penetrate anyone also explains the place they are assumed to take in this gender system based on sexual practices. Mexican essayist Octavio Paz (1961:77), who contributed to the elaboration of Mexican nationalism and the myth of the macho, summarizes well how this dominant idea is ingrained in the material aspect of the body when he states: "The *chingon* is the macho, the male; he rips open the *chingada*, the female, who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world." The female body is seen as open(ed) and impotent, unable "to rip open" the male, always dominated and dishonored in this sexual dynamic. For the female, "biology is destiny" and this hollow body has no other option than to be woman, and embody sexual passivity.

As the active/passive binary envisions females as passive, it appears that such an idea is not applicable in female same-sex sexuality. How would two passive beings engage in any kind of sexual exchange? Female same-sex sexuality has to be conceptualized, created, through other routes, other ideas that perceive female bodies differently than as passive object, available to be "ripped open." I follow this logical train of thought departing from studies on male same-sex sexuality, that underline the passive/active binary to be a dominant ideal, in the hope of understanding why this concept is not so common in female same-sex sexuality. At least as we will see, it is not so common in the mere definition of the terms.

Socio-historical factors should also be considered to understand with which ideas this notion competes and how the subject might adopt other ideas with more ease. The rise of feminisms since the 1970's prioritizes more egalitarian gender relationships. These can often be observed among youth, in this sense effacing an active and passive dynamic

based on a gendered relation of control and domination. As I will discuss in more detail, the stronger presence of the gay and lesbian movement is also important, since it conceptualizes the homosexual status related to the object of desire and not connected to the act as it is in the passive/active dynamic in male same-sex sexuality. Lesbian feminism itself conceptualizes relations between women as challenging a heterosexual model based on gender power differentials. The presence of these ideas might help to explain why the active/passive notion is not apparently so common in the conceptualization of female same-sex sexuality. These changes have certainly affected as well male sexualities in Mexico City, and not all males practicing same-sex sexuality necessarily view their selves through the active/passive binary. Nonetheless, during fieldwork, in talks or in jokes, these roles seemed to be more widespread in male same-sex sexuality.

However, not so common does not mean absent. It is difficult to argue that there exist a clear ideal of activity and passivity that is applicable to female same-sex sexuality. There are rather positionings, around the binary, as understood traditionally in male same-sex sexuality, but these positions necessarily imply a creative reshaping, since as I suggested, the binary does not conceive the female body as anything else than passive.

One of the ideas expressed, although not so common, by some females practicing same-sex sexuality is that the female body is not always seen as a limitation to speak of passivity and activity. Eli stands out from other women, as she is one of the rare ones who labels herself with the binary. She calls herself active. In addition, she is also one of the rare persons I interviewed, who married and has children. Eli is rather tall and slim. Her hair is kept very short and she generally wears boyish clothes, such as cargo pants,

button down shirts and large T-shirts. In the streets she is often perceived to be a man.

Eli, herself says in the interview that she never has been "very feminine" even though she identifies as a woman. She points out her sexual behavior for referring to herself as active:

Eli: Look, in fact in the lesbian ambiente it is more difficult to find a situation where you have an active and a passive... For example, among gay men, the passive is the one who receives, the active is the one who gives, and the inter is the one that does both. But between women it is more difficult because there is not necessarily one who gives or receives. In my case I can tell you that I am active, literally, because I like to give but I don't like to receive. Maybe it is some kind of fear, or not fear but I am more interested in satisfying my partner than myself.

Anahi: Do you believe that the majority of women couples are like this?

Eli: No, I believe that lesbian couples are really inter.

Presenting herself as active, Eli however believes that this is not usual in female same-sex relations. She qualifies most of those relations to be *inter* (short for *internacional*), which stands, as I discuss in the next section, for a person who takes the active and passive role. Eli, suggests that she is different from other women practicing same-sex relations, constructing herself as active from the fact that she is more "interested in satisfying" her partner. Interestingly, Eli suggests that satisfaction is in the passive position. There are however other reasons for which she calls herself active. In effect, further on in the interview, Eli affirms that being active or passive also implies a social behavior, she says:

Eli: What happens is that in buga (heterosexual) relationship there is always a masculine figure, literally. But in lesbians or guys relationship, there is also one of the two that has the masculine role. Let's say that this is the active part.

Anahi: Like in terms of action, what would it be?

Eli: Like in my case, I am more cabron. I defend my woman, nobody can touch my woman. And I am also a real gentleman and the one who carries the pants, literally in the relationship it is me. I mean the one who decides what we can and cannot do... Of course always with the other's agreement.

At the beginning of this last segment, Eli continues affirming that she is active. She symbolically maps herself through images as, she “carries the pants” and she is the one with “balls”. She also affirms, what it means to be a gentleman, which often consists in treating women with courtesy, accomplishing actions such as letting the woman pass first, pulling the chair for her etc. Contrarily to her opinion in regards to sexual practices in female same-sex sexuality, Eli believes that you have a masculine and a feminine behavior in any type of relationship.

Eli’s vision of activity and passivity, for herself, is close to the one described in studies on male same-sex sexuality. Her sexual gendered behavior corresponds to her social behavior. Nonetheless, it is not the exact reproduction, a certain bridge between ideas needs to be built since she has a female body. In contrast to male activity, Eli positions herself in a space that has not been define in dominant ideals on sexuality. Females are socially brought up to become women and traditionally to be desinterested in sex or to hold the passive role in sexuality. Eli does not lose her ‘honor’ (perhaps it is what she means when talking about “fear” above), but she also does not gain anything, unlike males who assert their masculinity in activity (Carrier, 1995). Eli point of view on activity and passivity is rather rare among women I interviewed.

In contrast to Eli, Marina believes that you have an active and a passive partner in female same-sex sexuality. Nevertheless, these roles are far from being fixed. She explains her definition in relation to what she considers being attached to the practice of sex:

Marina: There are people who out of sexual relationships, do not show it but in the bed it is different. One is active and the other passive. Others do not do it this way : One day

one is active, and the next one the other is passive, or even in the same night, one is passive for a moment and then after she is active. But forcefully there is something like this because of sex. They could not be both passive and see what is going to happen or for both to be active and do it at the same time. I believe that you have to wait and then the other does it to you...Even though there are things that you can do at the same time but not always. Let's say that one has to take the initiative. Maybe you are more turned on than I am, and then you initiate sex or you let me understand what you want. Sexually I believe that there is an active and a passive but in terms of a relationship there should not be. Both should take initiatives.

Marina affirmed earlier in the interview that she takes both roles. She does not consider herself active or passive but as she explains here, she believes that sex between women produces an active and a passive. Nevertheless, she does not suggest that a role is attached to a person, at least not so for everybody as she says that a person can take both roles "in the same night". Neither does she represent it as related to a social behavior, as she believes that in a couple both should "take initiatives".

For many, however sexual practices between women are perceived as clouding the passive/active dynamic. As Isabel suggests here:

Isabel: ... I don't understand why there should be an active and a passive. For a man it is understandable, because between men there is a penetration where the other can't do anything during the time he is being penetrated. But a woman, I feel that...she can take part in the action. I don't know, I like it when it is mutual. I don't consider that there should be an active and a passive.

Isabel points out that sexual practices between women do not necessarily perpetuate an active and a passive party. In her opinion, both partners "can take part in the action", blurring the passive and active categories. The binary is troubled by this possibility of other sexual dynamics, revealing a realm out of a "one-way" penetrative practice. Nevertheless, further on Isabel suggests that there is a social active/passive dynamic:

Isabel:... Well unfortunately I feel that there should be an active and a passive. Like there should be... I'll give you an example. Monica was really feminine and I loved to open the

door for her, pull the chair, give her the left side (of the side walk), hold her hips and for her to hold my shoulders. And with Sofia it is the complete opposite. Same thing, she kept me on the left side, pulled my chair and I was like "Don't do that to me" ...Every time I let her pass first, I ended up passing first. Or if suddenly we stopped the bus and I let her walk first, she held my hand and said "get on" ... In the sense of everyday life, I feel that there is an active and a passive. I prefer to be active, I mean, I like to give details. I don't like the idea (of being passive)... but I was ready to do it... I was ready to change roles.

In Isabel's view, relationships imply a performance where one ought to be active and the other passive. Isabel cannot imagine certain interactions such as the two letting the other pass first. One takes this initiative and the other follows the stream. In other words, Isabel suggests that two women taking the traditional active role would experience difficulties. To avoid complications, each partner should have her role. However, these roles are not seen as part of a person. In effect, Isabel is ready to change her behaviour, in order to be with Sofia. Activity and passivity are not fixed roles that travel with the person.

While I have presented the opinion of women who somehow believe that the active/passive binary is present in female same-sex sexuality, there are many women who refuse to be associated with such terms. They perceive the model as a dominant one, which limits the self and the exploration of sexuality. Paula offers her opinion, after I ask her if most women follow the passive/active dynamic:

Paula: Perhaps some of them do. I believe that the success or failure of a relationship can sometimes be related to this. Perhaps at the beginning, there are many women who think that it should be like this. It could depend on how much one knows herself, how much one has explored her body, not to fall into this. But I believe that it happens that some people think that it is only like this. There it depends on everyone.

Paula who volunteers at *Mujeres Unidas*, hears the stories of many women who are unfamiliar with female same-sex sexuality. Her comment voices a common experience which many women describe: The difficulty of imagining how sexual relations take place between women. Some attribute their lack of knowledge to the fact

that sex is always represented in relation to a penis, be in the media, in school or in governmental programs, which principally focus on reproduction. For Paula, dominant sexual practices do not seem to permit the full exploration of the body and sexuality.

The dominant model to which Paula indirectly refers, is the heterosexual one.

This last one also permeates social behavior:

Paula: If someone doesn't know how to be a lesbian, perhaps she looks at the model that we have, the heterosexual one...But I believe that more than wanting to be like this, I believe it can happen if someone likes it, not because the person has to limit herself. Personally I'm in favor for both to have initiative and to find equality in everything. If in a relationship they have roles, well both of them should feel comfortable with it. I think [what also] happens [is] ... I could be with a woman and be kind of reserved, and it could look like I am playing a role. And with someone else I could look more... more decisive and they could think that I am playing a role...I could like to pay, and then there could be someone doing it and I would not care. I will try to find a balance in everything because I would not feel good in a power relationship and for everything, the sexual, the social or anything else. I would not like to be limited in something.

Like many women Paula preferred a relationship that did not follow the passive/active dynamic or as she says "a power relationship." Paula views activity/passivity as imitating heterosexuality. In cross-sex relations it is not literally said that men are active and women passive. It is implicitly understood (Melhuss, 1998). In a similar form, the terms active and passive are not always explicit, and even known by every woman practicing sex with women. The reading of the active/passive binary, as a mimicry of the heterosexual pattern, resembles how butch-femme couples in the US were seen as a copy of heterosexual interactions by lesbian feminists. As Case (1993) describes, consciousness raising groups attempted to dissuade butch-femme roles during the 1970's. However, Paula does not condemn the model when the couple is "comfortable with it", but she personally does not feel at ease with it, because she finds it

limiting. She also implies that people will tend to read actions as gendered, always looking for the dominant model, when for her they might hold a different meaning.

By reviewing some of the positions, it appears that the passive/active dynamic is interpreted in many ways in female same-sex sexuality, sometimes defined by sexual practices, in others by social practices. After discussing how sexual identity is perceived, I will explore the intersection where the passive/active binary and the sexual identity model meet, to understand the implications these two have on gendered and sexual self.

5.2 The Introduction of the Notion of Homosexuality in Mexico

It is Saturday night. I go out to a club with Eva, her aunt and one of her friends, Susanita as they call her. For Susanita, in her twenties, this is the first time she enters a space of the *ambiente*. Inside, the air is humid, as it is in the rainy season. The smell of cigarettes, alcohol and sweat makes it even heavier. We then decide to sit near the air conditioner shaft. *Tia* (aunt) asks Susanita her first impressions of the place. Unable to hear her answer I assume she likes it since she nods her head. Susanita seems pretty comfortable, looking around while bobbing and swaying to a Petshop Boys song. After a moment, we get up to order *Sol* beers. Eva points to her friend and tells me: "She is cute but she is *buga*." Her friend looks puzzled for a moment and then asks for the meaning of *buga*. Eva answers: "*Heterosexual*, don't you know that? " Her friend shyly continues: "*Heterosexual* ? What's that?" Eva seems to disbelieve the question. She remains silent for a moment and then responds: "That you like dicks, fool!" We all laugh and Susanita does not push further the conversation. Susanita is not necessarily an exception: not all Mexico City inhabitants are familiar with sexual identity terms. *Put*a and *virgen* for women, and derogatory words, for passive effeminate males, such as *puto* or *maricon* are

certainly known by a larger number of the population than sexual identity terms such as *heterosexual*, *gay* or *lesbiana*, derived from the sexology lexicon (and later appropriated by the movement).

When I asked women of the *ambiente* if there was a word to categorize themselves in relation to their sexuality, they were fast to name *gay*, *lesbiana* and *bisexual*, or other similar terms that I will present further. Part of the frequent incidence of those labels might reside in the fact that I met many of the women through lesbian feminist groups. Nevertheless, during 2001, I enlarged my horizons and met many women unrelated with these groups, through a soccer league for example located in the mainly working-class delegation of *Iztapalapa*.

The introduction of those sexual identity categories has been taking place in many countries. Altman (1996: 77-78) describes it as “the expansion of an existent Western category which can be seen as part of the rapid ‘globalization’ of life style and identity politics, the simultaneous disappearance of old concepts and the invention of new.” Even though the notion was akin to a minority of professionals and bourgeois in Mexico at the beginning of the 20th century, it is at the end of the 1960's that the introduction of sexual identities began taking place. In October 1968, thousands of students were murdered at a protest, at the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* (Square of the three cultures). This unfortunate event changed Mexican political life and gave rise to many of the newest Mexican social movements such as the feminist and the gay and lesbian movement.

The arrival of sexual identity categories in a context does not however always assure their adoption. As Peter Fry (1995:7) suggests for Brazil, the adoption of sexual identity categories has not entirely taken place since: “The concept of the modern

homosexual falls on deaf ears in a culture where homoerotic practices are highly generalized and where masculinity and femininity are regarded as more important than homo- or heterosexuality.” This situation resembles the one for Mexico as previous studies on male same-sex sexuality have documented. In the case of female same-sex sexuality, in the general population I sometimes encountered little knowledge of an existing lesbian category in Mexico City. These circumstances not only concerns the knowledge of these sexual identity categories, but also of the common incapacity to consider women as anything other than sexually passive beings. However, other available ideas, held by the feminist movement, broadcast in the media or popularized by the lesbian movement, accord sexual subjectivity to women, counterbalancing the active/passive view.

In his article, "Gay Liberation and Coming Out in Mexico" the anthropologist Joseph Carrier (1989) describes the presence of a gay movement in Guadalajara, Mexico. These sexual identity categories, are seen to proceed from the West. In effect, men who adopt an active and passive sexual behavior, as is more common in the rest of North America, are referred to as *internacionales* (literally internationals) or *inter* for short. The claiming of a sexual identity is then perceived to be bourgeois and foreign. At the time I was in Mexico, and among the women I knew, the heterosexual and homosexual categories were seen as part of the “natural” sexual landscape to be encountered on the planet. Even though those categories emerged originally in the West, these were not perceived as imports by the majority of women I knew. It remains unclear whether if these categories were ever considered as foreign for women in Mexico.

The local movement has certainly contributed to giving a long dated Mexican appearance to lesbianism. In effect, the appropriation of historical characters and national symbols has been one of the tactics used by the movement. For example, various lesbian groups use the name of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, for their group, their cafe, or they display the image of the seventeenth century Mexican nun on their walls. Sor Juana, is mostly known as a great poet, play writer and as the first person in the continent to argue in writing for the right of women to be educated. She is also said to have written many of the love poems, inspired by the *Visrreina* (Colonial Queen) which in part explains why many lesbian group have appropriated her figure. Along with La Malinche and Virgen de Guadalupe, Sor Juana is one of the national women figures in Mexico (Tuñon Pablos, 1999). The famous painter Frida Kalho, who is said to have been involved in romantic affairs with women, is also often displayed on the walls of queer identified spaces.

Whether it has been consciously planned or not, in using important national figures, the lesbian movement affirms its Mexican character. This tactic might be common in Mexico. For example other marginalized groups such as the Zapatistas (EZLN) have appropriated for their cause the important figure of Zapata. Pilgrimages organized in 1999 and 2000, where groups of the *diversidad sexual* passed through the doors of the most important Church in Mexico, the Basilica of the Virgen of Guadalupe, constitute another example. During the second pilgrimage to the Basilica in which I took part in September 2000, participants claimed to be discriminated in society like Juan Diego was for being a native, when the Virgen appeared to him in 1531. Instead of denoting a separatist tone, the use of national figures represents a wish to be recognized and participate in the Mexican nation, as Earle (1994:27) comments for the EZLN case.

The study of lesbian movements in Latin America clearly demonstrates a trajectory specific to the particular context. There have been initiatives from different lesbian groups to take a stance on themes such as the public debt, inflation, unemployment and other topics according to Latin American realities (Mogrovejo 1999, 2000). It should not then be assumed that all influences stem from the West. Events such as the Lesbian Feminist Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean have permitted countries from these regions to come in contact and influence one another. The situation has not been easy since there are still great difficulties in consolidating a Latin American lesbian movement. Mogrovejo (1999:321) attributes the problems to the fact that lesbian conferences have been subjected to repression and direct political violence.

Women not directly participating in political activism but attending discussion groups, reading queer magazines or watching TV programs where activists appear, necessarily are influenced by the Mexican movement of sexual diversity. They are as well exposed to North American or European representations in movies, TV series or surfing the net. On individual levels, some women have been migrant workers to the USA, or some upper middle-class women studied English abroad. In the course of field work, I also met several foreigners in bars and clubs of the *ambiente*. Participation in different lesbian events in Mexico City or even neighborhood interaction between self identified lesbians permitted them to come in contact with different lesbian representations.

5.3 Some Sexual Identity Meanings

Homosexual identity is a historical Western construct (see Foucault 1978, Weeks 1981) stipulating that sexual behaviors be seen as a person's whole identity. While sexual identity terms, implying a homosexual identity, are of use in Mexico, it is nevertheless dangerous to be led by these semantic appearances and assume that the meanings reserved to them are the duplicate of the ones of use in the rest of North America. This is without mentioning that the meaning of an identity term such as lesbian, leads to a proliferation of meanings rather than to a single definition. As sociologist Arlene Stein (1997b:382) points out about sexual identity: "There are many possible configurations of the relationship between desire, practice and identity— many more such configurations than there are social categories to describe them." This is also very true in Mexico City and not all women who practiced female same-sex sexuality identified as lesbians or bisexuals and not all women who desired men identified as heterosexual or bisexual.

However, I found sexual identity terms to be of common use in every day discussions. They catalyzed a certain perspective of the self, and in some cases dictated a way of interacting with each other. "Eres gay?", is often an introductory line in spaces of the *ambiente*. "I think she is lesbiana" or "Is she from the club?", are common comments to be heard mainly in queer spaces.

When I asked women if there was a term they labeled themselves with, the words homosexual, gay or lesbiana were often interchangeably used. While these three terms express in general the idea of a sexual desire for the same gender, there are subtle

differences between them. The choice of the term to refer to one self is not random, as

Karina comments here when she discusses which words she chooses for herself:

Karina: Well, it depends. If I am with lesbianas, well I am a lesbiana. Because lesbiana has kind of a strong connotation. So, if I am just exploring the field, like it is the first time, I say I am homosexual. For example, when I told my brother, I told him that I was gay. Like gay sounds nice, homosexual is like more serious and lesbiana is kind of too descriptive. It depends with whom.

At the beginning of field work I thought that lesbiana would be the most common word for women who are involved in romantic and/or sexual relationships with women.

Some women like Karina also remark that lesbiana is a strong word. Eli who mainly uses the term gay, also believes the term to be "strong", as she says: "If you are walking on the street and you hear "I am lesbiana" everybody will look at you but if you tell someone I am gay, it is such a common word that no one will even care."

Generally, I found the word lesbiana to be used in mostly some contexts, such as in groups or by activists. Alternative versions of the term *lesbiana* such as to be *levis*, *leslie* or *lila* are also in circulation in the ambiente. Paula, an activist, prefers the word lesbiana:

Paula: Look at the beginning I use to say I like women, I did not say I am lesbiana, I did not like the word... When I started going to a group, I started using the word. It was hard to say it, but that was the first word that I used. I don't use the word homosexual or gay because it is more identified with men, in this sense lesbiana is for women. I have removed the prejudices from it.

As Paula mentions about her early years, some women also used the phrase "I like women." This directly refers to a desire, rather than an identity. For some, this sentence is often interchangeably used with sexual identity terms. For others as Paula, it is viewed as a fear of adopting the word lesbiana. Paula explains that, the word lesbiana is full of prejudices which makes it hard to adopt for many women. The facility with which gay, and even *homosexual* are used certainly reflects the social forces that are at play in the

context, principally concerning gender and class. Not only does *lesbiana* represent women, but often a sexual woman defying traditional ideals of sexuality. By contrast, the term *gay* is often associated with men or perceived to encompass any gender. Eva explains that in the past she used the words *homosexual* and *lesbiana* to refer to herself, but when she started going out to bars, her friends were men as well as women. In this scene, everybody employs the same term saying they were *gay*. She identifies with a certain group that counts more than a gender.

Gay also often tends to represent people pertaining to the privileged middle-classes, with their establishments often located in hip upper middle classes neighborhoods. The alignment with middle class is an important feature of the *ambiente*. This situation has been observed in other Latin American countries. Among the women I interviewed the majority are from the middle-classes, although seven lived in a working class neighborhood. Nonetheless, of these seven, those who held jobs, worked generally in offices, at the exception of Xia. Parker (1999) underlines that gay and lesbian communities in Brazil are mostly associated with the middle classes. Particularly in the case of gay men. Drawing on D'Emilio's article "Capitalism and Gay Identity" Parker (1999:116) explains the predominance of middle class individuals by their possibilities of being economically independent from their families and then forming communities based on sexual identity.

During field work, several friends sent me the same joke via electronic mail. It is the story of a man who tells his dad that he is *gay*. The dad answers to his son that he knows that he is not gay. The son insists replying that he has to accept him. His dad then asks him if he lives in the *colonia Del valle* or *Polanco* (upper class neighborhoods) or he

is wearing an Armani suit. "Do you own a Porsche or a Mercedes?", continues the father. The son answers no to all these questions. The father finally says "See, I told you, you are not *gay*, *eres solo un puto común y corriente* (you are not gay, you are only an ordinary passive homosexual)." Only a few gay identified people own those goods, however, the joke makes the point of illustrating how the term *gay* is associated with a certain prestige.

After asking which terms people labeled themselves with, I inquired about the meanings they granted to them. Sofia who volunteered at Mujeres Unidas organizes workshops and speaks with women questioning their sexuality. Sofia is familiar with the diverse ideas on lesbians available in Mexico City. She believes that many women arrive at Mujeres Unidas with negative and stereotyped representations in mind. As the Mexican anthropologist Nuñez Noriega (1999:167) puts it, the auto definition and acceptance of a homosexual identity depends to a great extent on the sexual field, on the battles for the legitimate representation of a sexual existence. Mujeres Unidas attempts to provide positive representations. However, Sofia believes that the most common concepts remain that all lesbians are aggressive *machas* and mad (in all senses). Based on this vision, Sofia is asked once in a while if it is obligatory to wear pants, to go to Mujeres Unidas. In another case a woman tells her that she hates men so therefore she thinks she is a lesbian. Sofia suggests to her that if she can love a woman and have the desire of establishing a stable relationship with her, she might then be a lesbian. She also tells her that the feelings she holds against men are unrelated to sexual identity. Interestingly, in her definition, Sofia focuses on the desire of establishing a relationship.

Karla, who suggested to clearly stick to the term *lesbiana*, defined it rather with an essentialist twist:

Karla: What it is to be a lesbian, well I don't know because I believe that it is a inherent condition because if you ask a heterosexual what it is to be heterosexual he will respond that it is a inherent condition to him. I did not get up one morning saying I will be a lesbiana. Simply I felt one day that I liked women. But there is no reason.

Wekker (1999:132) suggests that sexual identities are often presented as carrying deep strands of permanency, stability, fixity and near impermeability to change. In indicating that it is an "inherent condition", Karla certainly reproduces this idea. As Karla suggests, there is a relationship between desiring women and being a lesbian: it is part of this "inherent condition".

Paula who also volunteers at *Mujeres Unidas*, offers a definition to many newcomers implying an awareness of the many subjectivities there are to interpret the relations between desire, identity and practice. One afternoon Claudia, a sixteen year old, visits *Mujeres Unidas* for the first time. Claudia shyly speaks of being attracted to women and of her uncertainty with regards to these feelings. Paula who volunteers in the space, recommends that she become familiar with the *ambiente*. She also suggests that there is no absolute interpretation of her sexual identity. She says: "You will see. There is also bisexuality and then there are people who like a woman but they say that they are heterosexual. Everyone interprets it like they want." Paula's perspective is not necessarily the most common one I found on the field. Sexual identities in general tend to be seen as much more essentialized or, in Karla words cited above, as an "inherent condition."

Among identities that are named, many self identified lesbians describe having had sexual encounters or romantic relationships with women who are labeled as heterosexual (commonly called *buga*). One afternoon Isabel shows me pictures of her

family, old classmates and ex-girlfriends. On a picture she is on the beach holding a woman by the hips. Isabel looks intensely at the photo and says that it is her ex-girlfriend Patricia. She adds "But she is *buga*". As months go by, this statement is repeated to me many times. Diana, mentions in her story having several meetings with women who experimented with her. As she says "I think they were more like curious. Each one came to discover herself, "You know what, I don't like it. Bye." Diana interprets it as them "discovering" themselves and then reaffirming themselves as heterosexual.

These experiences before entering the *ambiente* do not seem to be a rarity. Some women such as Xia or Diana report having at least over twenty romantic or sexual encounters with women labeled as *bugas*. In some cases it seems almost easier to have such meetings out of the *ambiente*, since women such as Xia or Diana have had far more encounters out of lesbian spaces. I am under the impression that this is also (but not exclusively) a question of class, as they both live in a working class neighborhood. The ease with which those women could have same-sex encounters let me suppose that these exchanges are not so rare. Meetings with *buga* women generally take place out of the *ambiente*, in the neighborhood, school, work etc.

In "Gay liberation and coming out in Mexico" Carrier (1989) presents two coming out stories. José, who identifies as a passive homosexual, says he prefers "straight" men. Carrier writes:

One of the major reasons José is attracted to his boyfriend is that he is, by Jose's standards, heterosexual. If the young man turns out to be gay, José is not at all sure if he will continue to be interested in him sexually(1989: 248).

Carrier does not discuss why active men can be seen as heterosexuals. However, he seems to suggest that active men predominantly maintain relationships with women and limit their homosexual behaviors. Xia presents a similar idea as she says that such

encounters rarely lead to long term relationships, as these women get boyfriends and “then they get married.” This does not mean that some *bugas* will not identify later on with the label *lesbiana* (or the opposite could also occur). The linearity of sexual identity construction has in fact been strongly contested in North American studies (see Rust 1997).

In the eyes of many, *bugas* are considered to be “closet” cases (Sp: *Estar en el closet*). For this reason many women do not date *bugas*. Many comment that it is problematic since they are not always willing to be public about their relationships. In fact, once they enter *el ambiente*, many women quit going out with women who identify as *bugas*, as will be illustrated in Diana story. In her story, Paula also talks of being unsure of going out with Sara since she is new in the *ambiente*.

Buga women predominantly going out with men, are rarely called *bisexual*, which is traditionally used for women desiring or practicing romantic/sexual encounters with women and men. Neither, did I meet many women openly labeling themselves bisexual. In practice, five women I interviewed had sexual and/or romantic experiences with men, in the past year, but none of them claimed the label bisexual (or heterosexual). A discussion group that provides information for bisexuals used to be in place at Mujeres Unidas. However, no meeting occurred during the time I was on the field. In general, little concerning activism exclusively bisexuality appears to be done in Mexico City. Bisexuality is discriminated by many people in and out of the *ambiente* as is also often the case in North America (see Rust 1993, Ault 1996). This might also explain the rare times women openly labeled themselves in such ways in the *ambiente*.

In the course of a trip to Mexico in 1998, the first term I came in contact with to denote individuals practicing same-sex sexuality was *ser de ambiente* (to be of the environment). As discussed in the "Setting" section, for people familiar to *el ambiente*, it corresponds to spaces frequented principally by queers. I insist here in the use of term queer, since to be of the *ambiente* does not mean to be exclusively a lesbian, a gay male, a bisexual etc. It is not necessarily associated with a particular identity, only with gender and sexualities defying the traditional notions. In this case the sexual preference of the individual is named in relation to an environment that s/he is part of. However, the meaning is also valid for someone who simply practices same-sex sexuality and does not necessarily goes to the spaces. Most people familiar to the term are somehow in contact with *el ambiente*. *Ser de ambiente* is not necessarily publicly understood since it is more of an internal code between the people in contact with this world. *Ser de ambiente* escapes to a certain extent the rigid categorization of identities but still gives a sense of resisting traditional gender and sexuality discourses.

Another way to get away from this categorization is to refuse to be associated with any sexual identity terms. In a conversation that I recorded at a cafe, one of the participants refused to be categorized:

Fabiola: *Are you buga or lesbiana ?*

Gabriela: *Mmh ?*

Fabiola: *Are you buga or lesbiana ?*

Gabriela: *I am puta (a whore).*

Without knowing Gabriela's motivation for answering as such, her comment is interesting as the term *puta* makes reference to traditional ideals where sexually active women are perceived as whores, opposed to virgins. Gabriela then simply locates herself as sexual being. Nonetheless, terms such as *puta* and *virgen* can also be seen as sexual

identities, departing from Foucault's point of view in which sexual behavior becomes the marker of one whole identity. As I will discuss, in the next chapter the sexual conduct of women in the *ambiente* is often judged through double morality standards. Nonetheless, Gabriela's answer to such a question is rather atypical. More than often I observed women, in the *ambiente*, to categorized themselves and other women into the homosexual or heterosexual categories, which were the most common. Bisexuality is rather rare in terms of identity but not so uncommon in practice. Those identities intersected with the gendered active and passive categories, producing an interesting matrix that should now be discussed.

5.4 Intersections in Identity Constructions

I have until now explored important ideas which competed in the conceptualization of female same-sex sexuality. In every day life, these notions are not divided as I have presented them. In order to illustrate how this operates, I will discuss the matter through Xia's interview. Xia was 22 years old, at the time of the interview. She lived with her parents and her two younger brothers in a working class neighborhood at the outskirts of Mexico City. Her story is not necessarily a common one as at some point, she says that her sexual desire for women led her to identify as a man. Although I met a few females practicing same-sex sexuality whom identified as men and went by the label *transgénero* (transgender). Xia's story is particularly interesting since it clearly illustrates how the active/ passive and heterosexual/homosexual binaries exist side by side and might intermingle between them, or with other ideas reinforcing these key ideas in the construction of female same-sex sexuality.

In order to understand this coexistence, I will first review the implication of a gender construction viewed through the active/passive sexual roles. Based on studies on male same-sex sexuality, sexual behavior has been identified, by many authors, as constructing gender identities. The role to be played is conceptualized as much more entangled to the person. A corresponding social behavior, appearance and sexual behavior are often to be observed. However, a wild card remains, as independently of his appearance or social behavior, a penetrated male will be seen as more feminine.

In the case of female same-sex sexuality in Mexico City, the congruence of the three elements mentioned above seems to be much rarer. Even Eli, who calls herself active and presents these three facets, admits that she believes most women to be *inter*. In general, activity and passivity, are presented as fluid, as nomadic and unstable categories that can vary from one relationship to another, or from one moment to another. These revelations render problematic the idea of penetration as the locus of gender construction unless women who practice same-sex sexuality consider their gender as mutable and unstable. Butler (1990:70) considers gender to be fixed through an 'enactment that performatively constitutes the appearance of its own fixity'. In the light of Butler's perspective on gender, females practicing same-sex sexuality do not sustain the same performance, or rather their performance crosses over and over a border established by penetrative sexual practices. Following this reasoning, these women would view themselves as genderly ambiguous. Certain women would disagree with such a perspective as ambiguous women in terms of gender, as the ones having a masculine appearance sometimes face discrimination in the *ambiente*. Nevertheless, many of my

friends independently of their appearance or social behavior suggest that they are not very conventional in terms of gender.

In the next chapter I explore several gendered terms, generally reserved for men, which are used in the *ambiente* for women. One consists in calling a woman who dates many women a *cabron* (bastard), instead of the traditional term applied to women in this situation which is *puta*. In addition, when I asked women if they were able to identify other females involved in same-sex sexuality, some argued that they could, since they looked not very conventional in terms of gender. As Paula phrases here: "Not that she has to be *macha* or aggressive, but there is a certain flexibility in her body... It could be that she transgresses with the stereotypes of what should commonly be a woman."

Xia also offers a similar opinion:

Xia: Even though they are very feminine, they always have like a masculine style. You understand? A really feminine woman will not tell you things like they go, or they don't really swear, like they are more like princesses. A gay woman, even though she looks really feminine is a "canija" (~ bitch), like they don't really care of public opinions. And right away you realize it because imagine you are with some girls and other girls pass by and right away you see their eyes moving. Ha. Ha. Logical.

Following Xia's description, non-traditional aspects of gender seem to principally be manifested in a social behavior. Xia identifies women involved in same-sex sexuality as "gay women" even though I do not pronounce the word phrasing the question.

Considering that activity/passivity is not the only model of same-sex sexuality in Mexico, Xia echoes the one of homosexual identity. Such a model implies that two persons of the same gender can be attracted to one another. Therefore, gender construction has to be viewed through other routes than, for the homosexual/heterosexual binary to exist. The sex/gender relationship constitutes an important idea on gender

attribution. This one is perhaps reinforced by a perception of sexuality emphasizing reproduction.

While Xia perceives "gay women" as "masculine", she identifies herself as a woman through the sex/gender perspective. Xia explains that her attraction for women brought her confusion on gender:

Xia: What happens when in your mind you are a man in the way you dress and perhaps on your face. And what happens when you take your bath and you look at yourself in the mirror. Many contradictions emerge and you start saying what's up with me. What kind of game are we playing? I can tell you that when I was 20 years old, I did not like to look at myself in the mirror. It took a lot for me to understand that I was a woman. I am a woman. So, yes thanks to a friend, I understood. I took a lot of work, but in the end I feel good now.

As commented, Xia's experience is far from being everyone's, since very few women I interviewed identified at some moment as men. Nevertheless, this narrative makes the point on how the sex/gender unit is a dominant idea on gender attribution in the Mexico City context. Xia first resists the sex/gender idea, but with the help of a friend, she modifies her vision and appropriates this idea. Later on in the interview, she reveals that her friend, Emma, was part of the *ambiente* prior to her. Emma, whom she met at *Preparatoria School*, often spoke to Xia about her girlfriend. Emma also introduced her to the *ambiente*, inviting her to bars, cafes and *Mujeres Unidas*. In other words, Emma initiated Xia to a space where the sexual identity concept is very present. Xia remembers her first night at *Nya* a bar of the *ambiente*:

Xia: It was April 30th 1998, I'll never forget. I arrived dressed as a boy, in fact at the entrance they sent me to the men's line for security check... I was looking at very beautiful women, and next to her a very beautiful woman. Or a very muscular guy, with a similar man. Ha. Ha. How bizarre! I never had seen this, and I thought it was very strange.

Xia is visibly not only surprised to see women with women or men with men, but also by of their similar appearance. She enters this space where same-sex relations are perceived as woman-woman relations and not as woman-man relations as activity/passivity suggests. Xia judges that this encounter with the *ambiente* modified her gender perspective. As she says "Ahi empeze a captar" (There, I started to understand). It also transformed her vision of same-sex sexuality in relation to gender. Here she explains:

Xia: This is what I thought before, that one had to be more macho than the other. But I believe that it just depends on the person because there are people who are masculine and like masculine people and there are feminine ones who love feminine. There could be everything. I don't really believe that it is about playing a role, about I am a man and you are a woman. It is about being who you are.

Her entrance to the *ambiente*, certainly influenced her ideas as it is also in this same period that Xia "Comes out" to her family:

Xia: It was when I was 20 that boom! everything came out. Because, I thought, my mom will know it first, I mean my family, so then I can tell other people. Because if you say it to other people they start with "I will tell you something, but don't tell anyone." Then everybody knows. So the rumor could arrive to my family and it was better for them to learn it from me. So it was first the family and after my friends.

However, when I asked Xia, what began changing when she started going to the *ambiente*, she rather answered in relation to music and clothing styles:

Xia: It was very funny because I am a real rocker, I mean I love rock'n roll, to dress this way, I like bars where bands play... So when I meet a girl of el ambiente, I go crazy for her and she starts bringing me to these little places with pop music. At the beginning I thought what am I doing here? But as long as you can be with the woman, looking at her ass shaking, you are happy. At some point I transformed into a fan of Kabbah, [a pop music band]. I mean, me dancing on[the song] "La calle de las sirenas" Ha. Ha. Ha...So I started doing strange things, my mother was like "What's up with you? You are about guitar, and playing drum." I suddenly was buying the little cassettes of Faith and "Eres azucar amargo" and dancing who knows what. But it was for very little time, I slowly started going back to my places.

Popular bars of the *ambiente*, are generally known to play dance, techno and pop music. While this music is often associated with an international queer scene, in Mexico it is also often related to the upper middle classes. To a certain extent rock music but more particularly the 'rock look', displaying leather clothes, black T-shirts, long hair and beard for men, or boots are often viewed to be of the working classes. So Xia speaks indirectly of a class appearance transformation. Nya is in fact mostly known as a middle class bar, where the cover charge costs 70 pesos (~12 CAN\$), a high price to pay for people working at minimum wage (~ 6.50\$CAN/day). In acceding to the *ambiente*, Xia also intimately enters a different universe than the one that surrounded her in her neighborhood. At the beginning Xia can afford these places. She first works as a clerk in a pharmaceutical company, but as she has a *preparatoria* diploma, she is then hired as technician in the laboratory where she earns 4000\$pesos /month (~667\$CAN). In that period she minimally contributes to the household income. Later on the company closes and Xia regularly changes jobs: she works as a delivery person, a cook, a newspaper distributor etc. It is also at this time that her father contributes less at home. Consequently, she must help her mother, who works as a cook, to pay the rent and food. She then starts playing with a band djembe drums in subway wagons, and collects money from passenger donations. Xia continues playing as she can earn more than in her other jobs, approximately up to 3500\$pesos/month (~583\$CAN).

A part of the *ambiente* can be more difficult to enter if one is from the lower income classes. More than the difficulty of paying the price of activities, classist attitudes reject working class women. These prejudices, are not exclusive to the *ambiente*. The Mexican middle-class bases its position on occupation, wealth, and *cultura*. That is to say

that this small portion of the population generally holds professional jobs, owns a certain amount of goods and is considered to behave with a certain respectability that people of the working class are perceived to lack (Hubbell 1993:2).

The discrimination against women of the working classes, is in some cases vividly expressed. For example, on one occasion I invite one of my friends, who is of upper-middle class, to join Xia and me for coffee. My friend refuses and says that she is not interested in being around "those kind of people." I had commented to my friend that Xia is a subway musician. When I insist, she then argues that it might be dangerous for her job if they see her sharing a table with someone who is "poor".

As in this example, social class directly intersects with gender and sexual identities. For many women, belonging to the same social class might be more important than sexual identity in order to recognize each other as part of the same community. There are a few bars or cafes which are cheaper, but the same class division operates, as women of the upper classes do not frequent these spaces. Xia's change of style might express a desire, to be recognized as one of them. This is not in terms of sexual identity but in terms of social class. It is not always possible to guess a person's social class by their appearance. However, one of the first questions to be asked when two strangers meet is: "Where do you live?" This has often the objective of inquiring about someone's social class. Some of my friends also argue that there are certain identifiable signs such as clothing, hair style and language use.

Later on in the interview, I ask Xia, how she feels as a woman according to what is supposed to be a woman in Mexico. She laughs and says that she feels different from the model. However, she quickly makes the remark that "Today it is not about women

cleaning the house and men doing mechanics, you can do whatever you want. I am inclined towards different activities than the ones women generally do." She then adds that it depends on one's tastes and that there are women who today are feminine, but that she is different from that. When I ask her if she is similar to women in her neighborhood, she responds " They are still *abnegadas*... and I'm the neighborhood *loca* (crazy woman)." Xia literally says that she is not very "feminine", but in adding terms such as "today it is..." she suggests that new perspectives on gender, aside from the traditional model, are available today. The subject has a latitude to construct gender "depending on their tastes." However, in bringing the *loca*/*abnegada* comparison, she indicates that traditional ideals predominate in the view of her neighbors. She also locates herself as a woman in the eyes of her neighbors as they perceive her as a *loca* (crazy woman). Xia has, in fact, dreams which defy traditional ideals that suggest that marriage and motherhood are the only future for women. However, as she says, "today" women might have more latitude to sculpt lives to "their taste". She explains her dreams for the future:

Xia: [My dream is] ... my life on the streets, playing the instruments I want... playing music. I want to visit many places but not to pertain to any. I want to meet many people, but no one to be attached to. If people love you they should then follow you, if that is what they want. I have an errant instinct, and this is not going to change. I don't think about, I want to work in this business, have a great house. I would not like that. I want to travel, get to know places and that's it. These are my dreams.

Changes in what it means to be a woman in Mexico City today offer many definitions within which Xia can locate herself. She can include the gender ambiguity, inherited from the active/passive binary, but can also identify herself as a woman as she does through the sex/gender perspective. She can also grant herself sexual subjectivity as a woman and view herself through the lesbian category.

5.5 Conclusion

I have discussed how the active /passive sexual roles are seen as fluid and nomadic in female same-sex sexuality. Studies on male same-sex sexuality have argued that gender can be seen as constructed through penetrative practices. Various voices in this study do not entirely reject this view as the gender of women having same-sex practices might be seen as ambiguous by some. Nevertheless, activity/passivity in female same-sex sexuality is not the mirror of activity/passivity in male same-sex sexuality, as the female body has to be envisioned through other routes than the ones of passivity as it is traditionally considered.

Some women might, however, disagree with the construction of their gender as ambiguous since new ideas allow them to answer differently the question of what it means today to be a woman in Mexico City. These ideas, popularized in the media through the feminist or lesbian movements, accord sexual subjectivity to women. Unlike the passive/active notion, these ideas often propose gender dynamics defying a rigid gendered binary.

For many, gender is attributed in relation to sex. Female same-sex sexuality is then conceived through a homosexual perspective in which an identity is related to the object of desire. Compromising its own definition, sexual identity does not always correspond to a specific sexual practice or even desire. Some women who identify as lesbianas (or gay) practice sex with men, and in the same way *buga* women have erotic experiences with self defined lesbianas. Sexual identity is often seen as reflecting an internal and essential truth but some women express awareness of the variety of multiple configurations between identity, practice and desire. These gendered and sexual

categories intersect with axes, such as the one of class that is important in the ways that peoples represent themselves and others in Mexico City.

Chapter 6: On Love and Sexuality

One of the earliest studies to refer to women's sexuality in Latin America was conducted by Stevens (1973) in the Guatemalan highlands. Stevens described the other face of machismo, marianismo, where feminine ideals in Latin America included passivity, obedience and the capacity to endure suffering and pain. Referring to sexuality, Stevens (1973:96) claimed that "The ideal dictates not only premarital chastity for all women, but postnuptial frigidity." Subsequently, women's sexuality in Latin America has been represented as taking place at the heart of marriage and for procreative motives. In the voice of many Mexico City women, this perception of sexuality appears to be part of a divergent reality. Through their voices, sexuality does not only concern marriage and procreation, and the themes of desire, eroticism and sexual experience are rather common. This vision of sexuality is not only related to sexual preference. In her study of three generations of women, Rivas Zivy (1998:150) found that younger women in Mexican urban agglomerations do not only express themselves in accordance with the Catholic ideals of sexuality. Subjectivities on sexuality often reflect the complex landscape of ideas emitted in their context. These ideas are produced by health institutions, schools, the media, the LGBT and feminist movements, the Catholic Church and right wing groups (Amuchástegui 2001). But rather than exploring the production of these ideas by diverse social actors, I am interested here in looking at how women who practice sex with women appropriate, reject and/or reformulate these ideas for themselves. How they craft their sexualities in the midst of this multi-voiced context, and voice their own sexualities.

While the preceding chapter explored the topic of self-representation and identity, this chapter looks at subjectivities on love and sexual desires and practices. For this purpose, I will first discuss the extent to which traditional ideals on women's sexuality have changed. This introductory passage will serve to explore if women's sexual conduct is judged in the *ambiente* in similar ways. After having identified the ideas delimiting the construction of female same-sex sexuality, the practice of sex and romantic relations will be explored, in order to understand how these ideas are materialized.

6.1 A Changing Double Morality?

During several decades, Catholic ideals profoundly affected sexuality in Mexico. Today, such influence continues, but the religious meaning of those ideals is now perceived as a secular moral (Rivas Zivy, 1998:150). The loss of virginity is now interpreted as a challenge to family obligations and responsibilities, and not always as a sin against God or its Church (Amuchástegui and Rivas Zyvi, 1999:26). When I asked if virginity was something important for younger people today, the great majority, of both men and women, expressed that it had little importance for youth in Mexico City. Nevertheless, as I will discuss further, it appears in the anonymous survey I conducted, that there are some women who accord an importance to their virginity and avoid penetrative practices.

According to the results of a study conducted in Mexico DF, in October 1995, a third of the people, predominantly working class and people over 40 years of age, accorded a strong importance to women's virginity before marriage. In contrast, 25% thought that virginity has little importance and 40% believed that it is absolutely

unimportant (with a predominance supporting this view the upper classes and youth) (Tuiran and Salles, 1997:70) Such numbers might reflect the acceptance or resistance of Catholic ideals, but in the field the positioning towards the issue of virginity is not always this clear. Through their actions and words, people often express a range of ideas reflecting the complex landscape of multiple voices on sexuality available in Mexico City.

Ideas appear intertwined. For example, many women believe that virginity is irrelevant today, but promiscuity is often finger pointed and classifies women along the virgin/whore dichotomy. While it is acceptable, and often expected, to be sexually active with a stable partner, sexual adventures with many partners are not always encouraged. In the voices of many, the ideal of virginity seems to have been replaced by one of pre-marital monogamy. Karla comments on this idea:

Karla: I used to say: "No, I should not behave this way or I'll be a puta;." And you enter the pattern that everybody believes... I can only sleep with one man or one woman, because if I have sex with ten I don't have any value anymore for society. That's stupid. I mean if I sleep with one or ten, I'm worth the same. I did not see it like this before and my cousins, for example, don't see it this way.

Karla points out how this monogamous ideal permits and even sometimes values the expression of sexuality, but implies other restrictions. The prohibitive face of women's sexuality is subtly present in everyday life. This takes place, at school, in the media and as many mentioned, mainly in the family. Karla remembers having been taught traditional values of sexuality in her family:

Karla: Even though my mother never told me directly, because I never had a sexual education, my mother always sent subliminal messages to me when we watched TV or we read a magazine. She said: "Be really careful, she is a puta. She is this and that." This begins to be part of you. So when I started having my first sexual relations I associated it.

To different degrees, parents are important bearers of traditional ideas since they often behave as the guardians of their daughter's sexuality. As Sofia explains here, there is a difference in how her parents perceive her sexuality and that of her brother:

Sofia: The difference that I can see between a man and a woman is that my brother at his age says "Oh, I like this girl", and they feast on it and they glorify it. If I at 15 would have said "Oh I like this guy" They would have watched me like you cannot imagine. I mean, there is still a big difference in this.

Despite the fact that women's sexuality can be "policed" most of the women I interviewed have had sexual relations (21/23). About a half have practiced cross-sex sexual relations as well. The fact that a majority is sexually active is not to be related to sexual preference. In effect, Rivas Zivy (1998:151) comments that among the daughters who participated in her study on the sexuality of three generations of women, 4 out of 7 had sexual relations before marriage. In the youngest generation, pre-marital sex is not unusual as it has been for their mothers and grandmothers.

6.2 Judging Sexual Conduct in the Ambiente

Even though women's virginity is not as important for the youth, it would be false to imply that sexual behaviour is not a significant marker to classify women anymore. Women who practice sex with women are positioned in resistance to traditional ideals since their sexual practices are non procreative. Nevertheless, *el ambiente*, is not a closed world, disconnected from the rest of the city. At first sight, it appears that women in the *ambiente* often remain categorized as "good" or "bad" in relation to their sexual conduct.

Women who involve themselves in many love affairs often compromise their reputations and risk not being taken seriously by others. Sexual behaviors tend to be

essentialized: Whenever a person is thought to be promiscuous, she is categorized as a *puta*, a label that is difficult to get rid of, as it is seen often as timeless. Getting involved in a relationship with such a person is believed to inevitably lead to failure. Promiscuous women are the subject of gossip. When I interested myself in a woman of “bad” reputation, I had several people warning me to stay away from her since in their opinion nothing serious could be expected.

As a result, many women comment that they feel under surveillance in this environment, and that rumors are easily spread out of any minor detail. Rumors monitor sexuality in pushing towards the margins women who defy traditional ideals. Ana Maria recalls the years when she flirted a lot in the *ambiente*, and the attitude that her friends took towards her during that period:

Ana Maria: *Two or three years went by. I often woke up with different people. There were days I got up with people that I did not even know. I mean I did not necessarily sleep with them, and not because it could not have taken place. I mean, I was not always into it... In one day I could meet ten people, in one day I could kiss ten people. I did whatever I wanted...If I danced attractively, I knew that someone would fall for sure. Like this, I would only look at them in the eyes without saying anything and they came to me... There was a day when everybody that had been important to me were at the same place(bar)...there was Xia, Evelyn, Perla, there was that woman from UNAM and it was really funny because they all hated me. So they started talking about me. It annoyed me...[They were saying]: “She told you this, and she did that and blah blah...” But they never said anything to me. They did not come directly to me. But between them, she is an ojete (bitch), she is an ojete. I would come back and they were silent. So I started drinking and I picked up a vieja, and then I picked up another one, and then another one. And they were all dancing and so happy then, and I was the ojete there for them.*

As in this example, Ana Maria describes being judged for her sexual behavior. She is located as a woman defying the virgin/whore binary that remains present in the *ambiente*. Nevertheless, Ana Maria seduces women even though her friends gossip about it. Some of her friends, who judge her sexual conduct here, also gossip on other occasions

of their own seduction exploits. The virgin/whore binary is not the only idea in action in the construction of female same-sex sexuality.

For some women this notion is not applicable between women. Karla, for example, believes that she is not negatively judged when involved with women. She explains her understanding:

Anahi: *If it is between a man and a woman you are a whore but if it is between women (you say) that you are not one, what is the idea behind this?*

Karla: *I don't know, I suppose because they are men and because the social connotation is different. Because if I am a woman and I sleep with many men I am a whore.*

Anahi: *If you sleep with 500 women in which category do they put you ?*

Karla: *In lesbiana... I mean, if I sleep with 500 men, my surroundings are completely heterosexual and then there are stereotypes of men, women, society and what is going to say the family because I have to get married, have children, you know the house, the dog and the beautiful story. If I accept myself as a lesbian, for society, I don't have, the house, the kids, the garden nor the beautiful house, the parents in law nor anything. So connotations change and my surroundings are different.*

Karla explains how in her opinion, the virgin/whore binary is not in action between women. She then suggests that it is not really the fact of having a sexual life that makes a woman a *puta*, but rather the way she is positioned in relation to a man. As she mentions, many social expectations weigh on the shoulders of a woman (and of a man) when they have a romantic bond. If there are "no stereotypes of men, women, society...", then a woman who is sexually active can be considered differently than through the virgin/whore dichotomy. As Karla mentions, the woman is then considered a *lesbiana*.

Women who practice sex with women practice then a sexuality based in a different set of meanings. Nevertheless, when I inquire on these meanings, Karla explains that she is seen as entering the "man's role" when she is involved with a woman:

Karla: *Because my mother could say "Ay my daughter, how can you sleep with 500 men? How unacceptable." But if you are a lesbian and you sleep with 500 women " Ay mamita, how incredible, how incredible. That's my daughter!" Because then I enter in*

the man's connotation, because then I take the man's role...My mom would say a lady's man.

Anahi: *Why would your mom see you more as a "man" than as a "whore" if you are with many women?*

Karla: *When I had many boyfriends, my mother never said anything but I always noticed she was bothered. I mean she saw a guy and then three weeks later another one. So then she would tell me you should be studying instead, that it would not leave me anything positive. And that I should be respected, it was her favorite word. But after I ended my last formal relationship with my last girlfriend my mother has met my dates and my mom is happy and she congratulates me... So, I don't understand why when I was heterosexual she used to make that difference. When I used to go out with many men, she used to get mad and (in the past months) when I've gone out with many women...she was saying: "Oh how great that you came with someone. I'm happy for you, I think this girl is really nice." And my friends too they say how great that you are dating, it is hard to be alone...*

Anahi: *But why does she see you as a man?*

Karla: *I don't know. Ha. Ha. Ha. I don't know.*

As Karla says, her mother insisted that "she should be respected" by men. A thought that she does not have when she goes out with women, on the contrary she congratulates her daughter. Even though Karla does not directly mention it, her statement strongly echoes the active/passive binary, where the passive being loses its honor. With a man, sexuality is traditionally rooted in the perspective of the male body and penetrative sexuality. As Lomnitz-Adler (1992:125) has argued, in Mexico, sexual intercourse is commonly seen as a metaphor for exploitation. Limón (1997:69) also points out how in Spanish the word *chingar* (to fuck) can be used in the sexual and social contexts to designate a violation. This is not to say that sexual relations are only viewed as an act of exploitation, however drawing on the active/passive notion of sexuality, it is symbolically perceived to take place between gendered unequal beings, where the penetrated one is dishonored. In a heterosexual relationship, men are traditionally seen as the figure in power.

When she is with a woman, Karla categorizes herself as taking "the man's role", and consequently not being judged negatively by her surroundings. The "man's role" does

not mean that she is literally seen as a man, in effect her mother congratulates her as "This is my daughter!" Also, everybody uses the pronoun "she" in referring to Karla, including herself. "Taking the man's" role exclusively refers to the area of sexuality, and is a location that only exists in a relational vision. Karla does not exactly explain how she takes this role, but with a woman she is not relationally in a traditionally disempowered position. The traditional boundaries applied to women's sexuality, classifying them as virgin/whore, are then irrelevant, and challenging traditional ideals is not applied in the context of female same-sex sexuality, in the view of some women.

Perceiving women who practice sex with women, in the "men's role" as Karla mentions, is fairly common in the *ambiente*, as the term *cabron* illustrates. The label *cabron*, like *puta*, is reserved for women who flirt a lot, or have many partners. Outside of the *ambiente*, *cabron* is used for a very macho man who displays a controlling and aggressive behavior, and who is successful with women. In some cases it is also used as a friendly word which has a similar meaning to "dude". The label *cabron* portrays sexuality as a permitted behavior as it is related to a masculine counterpart. As the virgin/whore binary discourages women's sexual subjectivity, the term *cabron* applied to a woman values it.

The use of one term over another is not motivated by appearance, as I first believed. These terms, mainly used in gossip, are sometimes interchangeably used in a same conversation, for a same person. This term-switching highlights how the gender of women who practice sex with women is sometimes perceived as ambiguous. As suggested, in the preceding chapter, viewed through the passive/active definition of gender, women who practice sex with women, constantly overlap categories defined by a

penetrative sexuality. This ambiguity can be seen as coming from the difficulty of locating female same-sex sexuality in the traditional ideas of sexuality prevailing in Mexico City.

Other expressions reserved for women defying the monogamous ideal, rather underline social changes that have occurred in the past few decades. One afternoon in conversation with Isabel and her girlfriend, I tell them the story of some friends who have an open relationship and are allowed to date other people. Isabel first says, " Hay de todo" (There is of everything). She then labels them as *mujeres modernas* (modern women). Isabel's words make allusion to the cultural changes which occurred in the past few decades and which permit women to practice different sexualities than the one proscribed by Catholic ideals. What is interesting in Isabel's use of *moderna*, is that at no time is the virgin/whore binary invoked. In this example, the sexuality of my friends still locates them as women, however as women who have "contemporary" sexual ideals.

6.3 The Practice of Sex

6.3.1 Amor y Calentura: The Genesis of Sexual Practices

One of the expressions of desire can lead to the practice of sex. On a Friday afternoon Eva and I are sitting on the rug in my room. Eva is playing a video game on her cell phone. She distractedly tells me the story of why she ended her relationship with Yadeli. The couple met at a club and were instantaneously attracted to each other. Eva believes that everything between them happened too fast:

Eva: I cannot tell you that I did not love her, I did. But with Yadeli it was only about sex and that's it. After knowing each other for 3 days, we were already in bed and we had not even talked about what we would be. On the third day! But it was a very strong desire.

Between us there was a strong desire. There was a very strong calentura, very strong. And a very strong chemistry. So yeah, that's how it happened.

Eva, like many other women, represents a strong sexual desire as a *calentura*.

This word, literally means heat or fever, a metaphor commonly used to represent sexual desire and picturing it as an intense and passionate impulse. This image seems rather popular among Mexican women as Zavella (1997: 393) says that the metaphor of "fire" recurred in the "cultural poetics" of sexual desire" among the Chicanas and Mexicanas she interviewed in the US. The conception of desire originating from the female body has also previously been described by Rivas Zivy (1998) in her study of three generations of women, more specifically for the youngest generation.

While some women mention that *calentura* can lead to the practice of sex, many identify love as the essential ingredient for the practice of sex; in many cases it is even considered a prerequisite. As Alicia says: "I feel that a sexual relation...need to be made with love, with a lot of affection. It means everything. Both show themselves what they mutually feel for each other..." Many women highlight this idea and women's desire detached from love is usually negatively qualified (Rivas Zivy and Amúchastegui, 1998:24).

A couple of weeks after ending her relationship with Yadelí, Eva meets Rafaela. Once a week Eva waitresses at a bar. The first time that Rafaela goes to a lesbian night, she meets Eva. For Rafaela in her late thirties, who is married and lives with her son, it is the first time she is with a woman. Eva claims to be madly in love with her. She describes them having great communication. "With her it is not only about sex", says Eva. Nevertheless, it becomes an important aspect of their relationship. As Rafaela had never

practiced sex with a woman before, she asked Eva to be her "teacher". However, things turned out to be different:

Eva: Her dream was to be with a woman, and believe me she does incredible things for someone who has never been with a woman. She told me, you are going to be my teacher, you are going to teach me. I told her, I will teach you but there is no handbook, do whatever you feel. Since then she has gone wild, you wouldn't believe it... She is very cachonda (playfully sexy). She is the kind of woman who comes out with a piece of lingerie and starts brushing her hair on the bed and very cachonda. I love it.

Rafaela's request speaks of her inexperience with women, but also of the rare representations of sexual practices between women. As Eva mentions above, there is no handbook for sex between women. Nevertheless, there are sexual practices that are more common than others, between women. These subvert the dominant model, the body must then be remapped, and erotic zones redefined.

6.3.2 Sexual Practices and Body Meanings

It was in the hope of exploring these subjugated sexual practices and understanding how erotic zones are defined in female same-sex sexuality, that I conducted a short survey on sexual practices. While I attempted to cover the topic in qualitative interviews, it was rarely possible to extensively discuss the topic (with some exceptions). In effect, such intimate talks generally take place within a couple or between very close and trusted friends.

The 55 respondents were found in a lesbian café and at a discussion group on sexual diversity. Among other questions, women were asked which sexual acts they had performed before with a female partner. I wrote the possible choices with two of my friends in Mexico City who labeled themselves as lesbians. More specifically respondents had to answer what they had practiced on other females (traditionally seen as active) and

secondly what other females had practiced on them (traditionally seen as a passive). It is this second category, that I will examine as it reveals the meaning attached to certain body parts.

According to the survey, the most common practice is clitoral stimulation as 50/55 women answered that they had practiced it. This result matches the comments voiced at the Internet discussion group, where the majority of participants agreed to say that female same-sex sexuality is more clitoral than penetrative. Many presented this choice as a question of pleasure, and specified that it is not related to their sexual preference, but to the knowledge they have of their own body. This preference is also emphasized in the survey since oral clitoral stimulation is the second practice to have been performed by a majority.

Penetration is third since a lower frequency of women practice it. Penetration had never been practiced by 17/55 women, and 13 among them said they were sexually active. In the light of these results I asked why less women would have practiced it. Some people expressed their surprise but others suggested that they might have accorded importance to virginity. Karla provided her opinion:

Karla: I believe that there are women who stay stuck in this, and that they spend their life like this, and there are other women who say: "Ok, I understood, if they penetrate me or not, what's the big deal." Me for example I already went through this process, I can be penetrated and I don't associate it with pain and all of this. I see it as a sexual pleasure but this is after ten years.

Other researchers of women's sexuality in Mexico, also mention that there is a stronger acceptance of pleasure and eroticism among younger women (Amuchástegui 1994, Rivas 1995, Szasz 1995 cited in Szasz 1998). However, this does not mean that traditional ideas proscribing women's virginity do not hold weight anymore. In effect, as

Karla mentions, it took her ten years, to perceive penetration “as a sexual pleasure.” Ten years of living a symbolic transformation where meaning over parts of her female body, particularly her vagina, are reassigned. In this passage, Karla seems to suggest that independently of whether a sexual practice takes place with a male or a female, this zone of the body seems to hold the same meaning. Karla discusses further how the vagina had such a sacred aura as it symbolically stood for her inner world:

Karla: I mean after ten years I understood that penetration was about opening, not your body, not the hymen, not your sex, but your mind and how to give yourself to someone. I believe that women, and also for heterosexual ones, (the fear) is about virginity. Not the hymen but when you give yourself to someone, you give yourself as a woman. Really often for sex but also for love and you give a part of yourself in which they are entering, it is like an invasion to your intimacy, to your body, your spirit, your soul. I don't know how to say it.

In Karla's words, the loss of virginity is not a confrontation with God or to the family, but to the self to “your body, your spirit, your soul.” In this view the body pertains to oneself, and honor becomes the affair of each individual. In this vision the rest of the body does not represent an equally intense battleground. In another discussion, Karla specifies that during the ten preceding years, she mainly practiced clitoral stimulation. As discussed at the Internet meeting, the clitoris is seen as a source of pleasure, and as Karla suggests it does not endanger her honor.

The thirteen sexually active women who answer in the survey that they have not ever practiced penetration, claim as well to practice clitoral stimulation. Different ideas that can seem contradictory are accommodated, and sexual pleasure can be experienced while preserving virginity. The equation sexual activity equals a loss of virginity for women is then shaken. The fact that 21/23 women in the qualitative interview claim to have practiced sex is not then to be read as a resistance to the ideal of virginity.

If vaginal penetration is not as popular as clitoral stimulation, the least frequently performed activities are anal penetration and the use of sexual toys or objects. In a discussion on sexual toys with Ana Maria and Xia, both affirmed that they thought of them as being not natural. They both defended the opinion that they were satisfied with their bodies and did not need any additional device to explore sexuality. The products are available since many sex shops can be found in the center of the city, however women practicing sex with women seem not to make a frequent use of them.

Since I did not include caresses in the answer choices of the survey, many respondents reminded me not to reduce sexual practices to genitalia. In the category of other practices, a woman writes down: "Caresses, kisses, erotic performances." Another one says "Candle light dinner, gazes, caresses, hugs and kisses." During qualitative interviews, many women express comments similar to those, as Elena describes here:

Elena: Ay, imagine, to wait so many years to be with a woman. It was the best. To be able to feel her breast, her intimate parts, to kiss her, which was what turned me on the most. It was a completely different emotion... I mean in this ambiente, the motivation is different because it is not only about penetration, it is about eroticism, caresses, it is other things. Sensitivity, tenderness, affection, mutual support, there is a lot of mutual support as well.

Elena first maps parts of the bodies that are seen as differentiating male and female bodies. These include the breasts and "intimate parts." However, Elena does not stop her enunciation of desire, on these body parts, she stretches it to the whole surface where caresses wander. The territory of emotions is also included, rendering the chemistry of eroticism larger than the material surface of the body.

6.3.3 Sexual Space Dilemma

As most women live at home with their families, space to have erotic practices is in some circumstances a problem. Certain practices such as holding hands, or hugging are

homosocially acceptable for women. In this sense, two women holding hands are not always strangely looked at. More graphic representations of eroticism between women, such as lip kissing, are also performed in public spaces. During the interviews I asked women if they would romantically kiss their partner in a city bus, at a family party, in their neighborhood streets, and in a small town out of Mexico City. The majority affirmed without hesitation that they would kiss in all of these environments, with the exception of a family party. Many admit that unless it is their official *pareja*, with whom they are planning the future, they would not kiss in front of their families. Relations with the family are discussed in the next chapter. The large number of women who publicly demonstrate their romantic affection, speaks of a willingness to resist, in their immediate environment, heterosexist pressure. It also expresses changes that have taken place in Mexico City, as an older lesbian, pointed out that 15 years ago it was inconceivable to see two women kissing in a public space.

For closer sexual practices, some women invite their partner in their rooms. When families are not aware of their daughter's sexual preference, lovers are easily introduced to the family as friends. A strategy that is difficult to employ with a man, since parents do not usually let men enter their daughter's bedrooms. However, not everybody possessed the luxury of a room. In fact, women of the working and lower middle classes rarely have their own bedroom. They commonly share it with other family members. This situation then restricts their options. Since the home is not always the best site, many women go to hotels where they can express themselves in more intimacy. However, some of them feel shy to enter those spaces. Andrea expresses her dislike for hotels since she feels that it is too planned. In addition, not all women can afford renting a hotel room with frequency.

Bedrooms are not the only spaces where sex is practiced. Coming back from a bar, at five in the morning, five of us take the same taxi. We go to my apartment, not to split in different cabs at this perilous hour. Watching the rising sun, we discuss about the strangest spaces we have had sex. Blanca says that she always had sex with her lover in public spaces. She describes her most exciting experience to have taken place in an empty subway station at 7 am in the morning. While Blanca practiced it in public spaces for the experience of it, some women do not have any other options.

These public spaces are not known as cruising places such as there are for men. Certain subway stations and wagons, parks or zones of the city are known for men's cruising. To my knowledge there are no public spaces (that are not part of the *ambiente*) for women's cruising. In fact the incidence of anonymous sex between women seems rather rare in Mexico City. Only on one occasion, Diana told me that one of her friends had been kicked out of a bar for having sex in the bathroom with two other women she had just met. Aside from this anecdote, sex between strangers seemed rather strange for the women I knew.

The dilemma of space is not strictly related to same-sex sexuality. Due to double standards, women involved in sex with men can also face similar problems. At UNAM (National University) lawns are often crowded with students kissing and rolling on the grass and women's cafes can be full of women who feel they have nowhere else to go. However, for women practicing same-sex sexuality there is the additional stigma of having a discriminated sexual preference which does not always permit them to be rolling on the grass with other couples.

Even though it is illegal in the DF to discriminate against someone for their sexual preference, some women spoke of being victims of police extortion for publicly demonstrating affection to another woman. Tania was once retained by the police for kissing her partner in a park. The policeman said that it was acceptable for two men to kiss but not for two women. Luckily for the couple, the chief commander passed by and asked the police officer why they were held. The chief commander ordered the officer to immediately release them, as he saw no motive for arresting them. Nonetheless, not all police extortion stories have such a happy ending.

6.4 Romantic Relationships

6.4.1 What Women Want in a Relationship

Wearing a white dress while a nice man is waiting by the altar might be the dream of many girls in Mexico City. However, today this dream seems to count with many alternative versions. The white dress and the altar might be skipped, the man might be a woman, and the beginning of a common life might not be marked by a wedding ceremony anymore. These changes certainly illustrate the impact that the feminist and the LGBT movement have had in the past decades. In Mexico, today, there are young couples not only interested in the idea of marriage but in a relationship of quality. They ask for a respect of differences, communication, agreements and intimate knowledge, which will determine the duration of the relationship. Relationships are not only based on “until death separates us” as in past generations, but often “for the time we are together” (Sanchez, 1994). The continuation of a relationship is not then defined by a divine or legal institution, by a superior power “forcing” the couple to remain together. Many women affirmed that in any case, marriage is not the only element for a couple to remain

together. What then do women look for in a relationship with another woman, what do they expect from their partners and how do they view their relationships in a context where the couple is predominantly recognized as being composed of a man and a woman?

In the spirit of inquiring what women want from their partners, I direct myself on a Sunday afternoon to *La Casa de Frida*. This is the second time I participate in one of their meetings. I recognized most of the people in the large bright room, but I am not yet familiar with the names of everybody. In total, I count 14 people, we are sitting in a circle on old school desks. The crowd is mostly composed of students and young professionals in their late twenties. As I had been informed by the coordinators, today the theme is “What are you looking for in a partner?”

After presenting ourselves, we play a game where we have a word taped on our back. I have “melon.” In silence I have to look for someone who has a similar label, a fruit name I deduce. We look for our partners. Finally I find “papaya”, and there is also a group of three, and two who remain single. Based on the exercise, the two animators Yvette and Ximena ask everybody : “What do you need to form a couple?” At first, everybody answers characteristics related to inner qualities such as communication, respect, trust etc. We keep giving these kinds of answer until we reach a moment of silence.

Yvette, breaks the calm with her loud voice and gives another direction to the debate by stating that it is basic for her to be attracted to the person. She says: “If I am not attracted to her, even though we respect each other and we are honest, I don’t know what kind of relationship we can have.” She then continues saying that she prefers

someone to have her same rhythm of life. Yvette is a calm person who likes tranquility, and she could not be with someone who always goes out to discos. She prefers someone who likes to go for dinner and is talkative as she likes stimulating discussions.

Now that the conversation is open Sandra, who sitting by the window, mentions that it is important for her to be with someone of the same social class. She does not want to generalize, but she was in a situation where her girlfriend did not understand why she wanted to keep studying and get a better job. Yvette adds that in heterosexual couples you can observe with more frequency a situation where the man has a university degree and the wife has not finished high school. In her opinion, this is rarely the case between women. Soon the room is filled with voices crossing one another, most present women vividly debate how social class influences what people do and where they go. To make her point, Sandra says that if she goes to the museum with her partner, she wants her to enjoy her time as well. If she is from a working class background her partner risks feeling out of place in the same way she could experience herself in a *banda* popular music concert.

Later on I mention that I like to have a partner who is slightly different from me, to discover her world. "We don't need to be the exact mirror of one another", I say. Vivian answers that we could call this a complementary couple. She adds: "Some call it active and a passive." Ximena replies that there are two theories, one where opposites attract and the other where similarities accompany each other. She also mentions that when someone dominates and the other lets her act as such, it is two steps from a violent relationship.

In general, women's answers regarding what they expect from a partner are similar to what most Mexicans seem to expect. According to a national survey on values, Mexicans view the success or failure of a relationship, as resting primarily on fidelity, respect, mutual appreciation, understanding and tolerance between partners; secondly on having satisfactory sexual relations and children, and, thirdly on pertaining to a same social class, having a good house, sharing home chores and similar interests (EMV, 1991).

Whether they were with a man or a woman, values and expectations of what makes a good relationship appear similar. Nevertheless, this is not to say that relationships with a man or a woman are considered to be the same by all women. Some attributed differences to gender. The most common ideas were that relationships are more tender, complex and intense between women. Other refused to categorize their relationships as they said that there were different types of women. As Paula answered when I asked her what she liked in her relationships with women:

Paula: I don't know. There is of everything. I could not tell you sensitiveness, there are also people with character and I like that. I believe that it is the love that is inspired between two persons... that makes me feel in love. It could be her feelings, the way she is, sharing things.

Paula expresses a similar argument to Weston's (1991) in her study on gay kinship in San Francisco. Weston notes that same-sex relationships are often represented in North America, as a mirror where the self is simply reproduced and therefore incomplete. Weston further argues that this vision is reductive, overlooking the fact that gender is not the only identity marker:

To equate difference with dependence or a power differential between partners likewise assumes gender to be the meaningful attribute that orders experience. Variations in context and in the cultural construction of identities ensure that likeness will not

inevitably represent the same likeness, nor difference the same difference (Weston, 1991:162).

This is illustrated in the discussion group. Women believe that it takes more than “any woman” to build a relationship. As many voiced on that occasion, it is not only a question of gender but also of class. Other exigencies related to tastes or personality are also believed to make varied female identities.

6.4.2 Being with a Woman : Homophobic Constraints

Even though many suggested that it is not possible to paint a monolithic portrait, a difference with heterosexual relationships is that same-sex relations are always positioned as outside of the dominant ideals. Not all women confront discrimination and some prefer to remain in secrecy. In a study on male same-sex partners in Sonora Mexico, Núñez Noriega, (1999:225) expresses that “before the individual lives in a couple he needs to have broken with many prejudices.” This is also very true for women in Mexico City. As life stories will illustrate, the process of arriving to a stable relationship often implies a previous path to acknowledge same-sex desire.

Some women experienced troubles with their partners who feel uneasy with their desire for women. Establishing a relationship with a person who feels guilty about her own desires is difficult, in many cases impossible. Frida had an arduous experience with her partner who did not want to show affection in public, in fear of discrimination:

Frida: [I told her] If you are shy there are bars...I mean we went to eat or to the movies a couple of times, but it was the only thing, and she was always like paranoid. We never went to gay places, we did not even kiss on the streets, or held hands. Sometimes I wanted to tell her “I want to hold you, I want to feel your hand, why do we need to be by ourselves? Why only in bed?”

Fearing homophobic harassment, some women spend most of their time in the *ambiente* with their partners. They attend women’s cafes, discos and discussion groups

where it is safe to demonstrate their affection, and they are recognized as a couple.

Whenever I stepped into *Reinas*, a women's cafeteria, I knew that I would find two or three couples kissing and maintaining a close body proximity. As Maya the cafeteria manager explained to me, for many of those women this is one of the only spaces they have to express their affection safely.

If some difficulties can emerge in the streets of Mexico City, the *ambiente* is not always perceived as a refuge to live happily ever after with your partner. In the opinion of many the *ambiente* is mostly a space for flirting. As Xia mentions here, she prefers to be outside of queer spaces with her partner.

Xia: I don't like the ambiente. You arrive with your woman and the ones on the next table are already flirting with her. So they don't care about you. They only want to touch your woman and they don't care if they step on you or not. So if you are with a woman and you go to heterosexual places well it is logic that they are going to be surprised when they'll see you kiss her. But it is ok, as long you are together, no one bothers you. That's what I don't like from the ambiente they are just checking out what they'll get.

While Xia is particularly bothered by the attitudes she encounters in the *ambiente*, many women such as Karina, mention that trust goes hand in hand with love. Karina told me that on one occasion, she went to a party with her *pareja*, Ana. A woman kept insisting on kissing Ana. Karina did not like the persisting attitude, but she knew that she could trust Ana. The fact that flirting is part of the environment did not endanger their relationship and Karina and Ana often frequented the *ambiente*. Without any doubt what Xia feared is strongly related to the issues of jealousy and fidelity that I found to be extremely present in relationships in Mexico City. According to Xia there are not many choices because on the one hand there are the voracious flirts of the *ambiente*, and on the other the strange looks of people. You have, then, to hope that you can meet at home.

6.4.3 Fidelity and jealousy

Traditionally, in Mexico, men are perceived as unfaithful. As Ponce and al. (1993:21) signal, men's fidelity is considered as possible and desirable, while women's adultery is viewed as a sin and a betrayal. In the 1940's Oscar Lewis signaled that women in the Mexican village of Tepoztlán were generally willing to tolerate infidelity as long as their husband supported them. In the 1980's, in the nearby village of Los Robles women similarly accepted such a situation (Levine, Suderland and Tapia. 1986:197).

In the case of women's relationships, there is no partner who is expected to be more unfaithful than the other, unless they are already viewed as promiscuous. It is also rarely perceived that a woman should economically support the other. Forced economic dependency situations are then rare (however, this does not mean that other forms of dependency cannot arise in couples).

In the course of interviews women pointed out they demanded fidelity. As Xia expresses here she viewed it as the most important component of a relationship:

Xia: Ay! It is the most important thing (fidelity). I really respect that. It is the only thing I ask in a relationship. I like to be with a woman seriously and I believe that from the beginning you have to put the rules. "You know what, I ask you for fidelity and I can give you fidelity." From the beginning: "What are we going to be, just have something for a while or what?"

Some women admit to being unfaithful, but a monogamous ideal predominates, suggesting that women have one partner. Elena confesses to having difficulties living monogamy and experiencing problems for this reason. As Elena comments:

Elena: I'm telling you, I had problems with her because sometimes I like to flirt and the more I drink, the more I do it. So we went a lot to discos and we always ended up fighting, pulling out our hair. It was because she saw me looking at someone and then I saw her dancing with someone and this and that so we were always mad at each other and it was problems and problems.

Elena's problems are not only caused by infidelity but also by jealousy. Most women express that they have encountered difficulties surrounding these issues. I, myself, experienced serious problems in most of my relationships in Mexico, as what is considered infidelity generally differed from my experiences in the North. Most women I dated considered suspicious for me to have coffee with another woman who is not *buga*, if they were not invited. Speaking with an ex, under any circumstances was seen as a great betrayal as well. However, in other situations I observed women who left more latitude to one another. One night when I went out with Eva and Miriam, Rafaela teased Eva saying that last time they went out, Eva's head was turning in all directions. While I first interpreted it as a reproach, Rafaela laughed and said: "I didn't know either in which direction to look anymore."

6.4.4 Living Together

Traditionally, a man who works and a woman who stays home and takes care of the house and children live in the same home. This is the complementary model where each partner has a clear role defined according to gender. Due to several factors such as economic recessions, the impact of the feminist movement and the increase of the level of education, this model is not the only one operating at the present time. As the traditional model has been changing in diverse parts of Mexico, it has been documented that women's paid employment does not necessarily mean, a shift in gender roles at home (Beneria and Roldan 1987, Safa 1995, Howell 1999). Women are often expected both to work and to remain the primary household caretakers. But how is this model reproduced when two women live together? How are tasks and occupations to be determined, when it is not decided by gender? As most women in their twenties live at their parent's house,

I did not extensively explore the topic of same-sex households. Among women I interviewed, only four of them had lived with a same-sex *pareja*. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the high prices of dwellings and the cultural imperative to remain at home until marriage, attach children to home for longer.

At the time of the interview, Karina was the only one who lived with her *pareja*. Karina left her parent's house at the age of 17, after her father's death. She rented a tiny room and then worked as a cashier to pay for her room. She then enrolled in Mexico National University where she met her first girlfriend and held a government job part-time. At the age of 19 she met Oli, her second partner, with whom she lived for two years. She then successively has lived with 2 other *parejas*, Ara and Barbara. She describes the household dynamics to have been different with each of her partners. I questioned her on how decision making and task sharing took place at home with her partners:

Karina: *I believe I never really had roles until now.*

Anahi: *And why are there roles now?*

K: *Ah, because Ara was married. I mean after having lived for four years with a man she believes that now that she is with me it is the same thing. That her mission in life is to keep the room clean, cook for me and wash clothes. I mean she really has this role thing in mind and not me. I mean now it is a coincidence that she is not working. So I go to work and this woman stays in slippers and she walks me to the door. Then I come home from work and my food is served so it is like this, like a super clear role. I hope that the day when Ara will work again it will be more equal and normal. I mean, to eat together but to do the food together or to go and buy it together. I hope that things will change when she will be working. I don't really like that. I mean, I like when she cooks for me, but I find it super strange that she is here all day in her slippers this seems crazy to me. I prefer like an equal relationship. Then she gets mad at me if I spend the money and I have to report to her if I spend some money. It is kind of strange.*

Karina perceives complementary relationships, where roles are defined, to be unequal. More specifically Karina does not value the traditional women's role. The figure

that Ara represents, a house wife whose “mission in life is to keep the room clean, cook for me and wash clothes” is not valued by Karina, nor by many of the women I met. My friend Xotchil expressed a similar comment when she mentioned that she did not like to talk in the kitchen because it reminded her of housewives who have most of their chats while they cook. She rejected any possibility there was to embody this figure. For many young urban women, the working woman model is more valued than the woman who knows how to take care of her house. What Karina disapproves of is not the manual tasks, it is rather for a woman to make the household and the care of it as the center of her life, as she says “her mission in life”.

In order to reestablish the balance Ara has to go back to work, but interestingly overall Karina perceives that she herself also has to participate in household chores. She is not even sure that if Ara starts working “it will be more equal and normal.” Karina attributes Ara’s behavior to the fact that she was married to a man for four years. This is in fact the first time that Ara is in a relationship with a woman. Conducting herself in the same way as she did with her husband does not seem like a “normal” behavior to Karina. Perhaps she is suggesting that a “normal” relationship between women should be more “equal”, as she here describes took place with Barbara:

K: With Barbara it was a super equal relationship...Because there were absolutely no roles, we were both equal ...sometimes I decided sometimes she did. There were no roles, it was really equal and it was great because we each spent our money. I don’t know, this woman treated me really well and I treated her really well too. I really liked it

A: How do you measure equality, for example with Barbara?

K: Well I don’t know, if we cooked, we cooked together, and we both washed the dishes... Barbara and I were like the way I am with my friends ... I don’t know. If I paid for the movie, then she paid for the pop corn. Then she would wash my clothes and after I would wash hers. Or I would decide to paint a wall and then she would decide to paint the other. It was great, really equal. She decided sometimes and I did other times, or I mean

instead, we decided together. It was a great relationship where we drove the reins together. It was 50/50, the best relationship I've had.

Karina suggests that a relationship should not be based on complementary roles, but on two independent beings contributing in equal amounts to household economics. Many women and men involved in cross-sex relationships had perhaps a similar vision, nevertheless as studies demonstrate women tend to remain the primary household caretaker in different regions of Mexico.

It is difficult to advance from this one experience what household dynamics take place between women. It is in fact problematic to speak of one and only model of a women couple, as other markers such as class, age and ethnicity intersect. Even in the case of one person, the diversity of experiences that Karina has lived in her relationships emphasizes the difficulty of categorizing a single dynamic. Nevertheless, tensions between the complementary model and new ways of managing the household are illustrated through Karina's words and surely all couples have to locate themselves in the context of those ideas.

6.5 Conclusion

In the past decades new ideas have come to transform the meaning of female same-sex sexuality. Women can then express their sexual subjectivity, as the rigid virgin/whore binary is less important than it was in the past when Catholic ideals predominated. Nevertheless, women are still classified as 'good' or 'bad', in relation to their sexual behavior. Independently of their sexual preference, there are borders, delimited by a certain sexual conduct. Nevertheless viewed through the active/passive

binary, in the active and masculine role, an active sexual conduct is not always finger pointed in female same-sex sexuality. A very flirtatious women can then be considered a *cabron* or a *puta*, somehow expressing a permissive and a restricted behavior. Overall it shows that there is a difficulty in locating female same-sex sexuality through the dominant ideas on sexuality that are available in Mexico City. The practice of sex takes place within this multiplicity of ideas. The vagina often remains a location of honor and shame for a woman. However, it does not constitute the only route of sexual practices as clitoral stimulation is more common among women and is associated to pleasure. Sexual practices include an eroticism which views the entire body as being involved in the exchange, as well as emotions. Women identify *calentura* or love, as reasons to practice sex. Women involved in romantic relationships with women, develop their relationships in locations that resist dominant heterosexist ideals. Where as marriage is not always the norm for young people today, many women wish to live with their partner in the future. There is no single model of cohabitation, but all couples must locate themselves in the context of the complementary model and the 'egalitarian' model that has emerged in recent decades, after women joined the workforce.

Chapter 7: Living with the Family

At the beginning of fieldwork it was not my original intention to devote an entire chapter to relations with the family. However, as time advanced it appeared evident that the family occupied an important place in the life of women I knew. Most women I interviewed lived at home (16/22) with their "biological" family. One of the most common topics of discussion that took place in the *ambiente* concerned relations with the family.

This reality certainly contrasts with the North American stereotype of gay people destined to live in solitude apart from their families and, as Weston (1991:23) suggests, incapable of reproducing a family, and perceived as "members of a non procreative species set apart from the rest of humanity." Women who frequented the *ambiente* did not exclusively live in this space as time was spent at work or at school, on the streets and almost inevitably at home. These women lived in households that have become increasingly interdependent economically, as recessions have affected the country and pushed many families towards the margins of poverty.

This situation has obliged families to perform several adjustments in the household. The home can then be seen as a site of intense cooperation but also of conflicts (Salazar Cruz 1999:145). A certain consensus must be reached to ensure the survival, but it is not guaranteed that everyone always secures their survival based on the same ideological affiliations. In addition, not everyone is always allowed to make their own ideas and strategies prevail in the family as power relations exist. Inequalities are often to be found according to the position held by each household member (Whitehead and Ortner, 1981).

Most of the women who participated in this research occupied the position of daughters and often sisters, in their households. Only two of the women I interviewed were also mothers (but only one lived with her children), two were aunts at home and one was granddaughter. The household composition varied as 6 lived in a nuclear family, 5 with their mother at the head of the household, 5 with the extended family and 6 had left their family household (3 lived by themselves and 3 with roommates).

According to their gender and as daughters, these women would traditionally be considered as the most disempowered members of the family. How would they manage their ideas within the family then ? More specifically how do they voice their subjectivities on gender and sexuality in this space ? Until now I have mainly discussed how these women live in the *ambiente*. For the majority large amounts of times are spent with their families, and families often occupy an important place in their lives. As nothing is unidirectional, the question is also how do their families, and what is expected from them in these families, influence the construction of subjectivities.

In order to explore these questions, the first step will be to inquire why most of these women live with their families. I will then look at how they relate with the home space and what is expected of them at home. In order, to understand the ideas that women have been exposed to, I will look into what they were taught at home in relation to gender and sexuality and how they positioned themselves in relation to it. Relationships within the household are not homogeneous. For this reason it is important to look at how the voicing of subjectivities is managed in front of different members of the household. To conclude I will look into the theme of "chosen families", and how members of these

families interrelate in these and in which aspects these might differ from "blood families" where they have been raised .

7.1 Why Stay at Home?

One afternoon, Juliana and her girlfriend Gabriela C. picked me up outside my apartment to go to a movie. Juliana is twenty-three years old and goes to medical school while Gabriela is twenty-four and works for an important publicity agency. They both come from upper middle class families. In one of Mexico City's famous traffic jams we started discussing whether or not they would like to leave their homes and live in an apartment. They told me that it was rare for someone to leave their home if they were not married. "If you leave your house then you are like really liberal" , said Gabriela. Money was also an issue since Juliana added that it was expensive to live by yourself. She added that they knew a female couple of their age who lived together and she had seen how hard they had to work every month to pay rent. " You can make it, but you'll have to sacrifice some things", said Gabriela. Another argument was based on the idea that living alone was lonely. Gabriela had participated in a university student exchange in Houston the year before. She explained to me that even though she had many friends she felt lonely living by herself. She came back from her courses and she had nobody to talk and eat with, as she usually did with her family. Many people who visited my apartment asked me if I did not feel alone. I always answered that I had a roommate but apparently that was not perceived as enough company. It did not replace the noise in the kitchen and the alive conversations in front of TV, that as my friend Geneva described, were missing in my apartment. Juliana also argued that since the city was dangerous it was preferable to live with other people whom you could count on. To conclude this discussion, Gabriela

said that now that she worked, she felt more independent from her family and she was progressively feeling more prepared to move out in the next few years.

Gabriela and Juliana are certainly not the only women who have chosen to stay at home. As the economic situation has been deteriorating over the past decades, families have elaborated several strategies of survival. These have included having fewer children, but also often keeping different generations under the same roof (Tuiran, 1993). As a result the children often opt to stay home and in some cases even after marriage. In addition, incomes are multiplied, when women and children work. For the working classes, collecting more than one income has been a key strategy of survival but the middle-classes have also used this same strategy to avoid a social class decline (Hubbell, 1993).

Nevertheless, I doubt that Gabriela worked to help her family as they pertained to the upper middle-classes, who owned several houses and cars. Gabriela started working after graduating from a private university in Mexico. Despite her well paid job, I doubt she could have held the same quality of life on her own: living in a similarly prestigious neighborhood; eating at the same restaurants; taking the same kind of vacations overseas; and all the other luxuries that only a few Mexican can offer themselves. But as Gabriela and Juliana mention, money is not the only motivation to remain at home, the first argument that they posed is in fact that moving out is very "liberal." Prieur (1998:43) describes the decision to remain at home in Mexico City, as going beyond class and sexual preference.

Marriage is in fact often the decisive moment to leave the house. However, in the working classes, it is not unusual for wives to move in with their husband's family. In a

traditional sense, remaining at home goes hand in hand with the ideal of virginity before marriage. In effect, it is even less common for women to leave before marriage.

Estella, 20 years old, recently moved out of her house with two friends. Her mother was accepting her recent departure with difficulty. At a party, I was telling her that in Canada it was more common that youth lived away from their parents but that it could be difficult economically. She angrily said "No, here people don't care if you have enough to eat, if you have enough money or anything like that, the first thing they think about is your sexuality." Estella was in fact expressing that women living out of home were often perceived as promiscuous. An unmarried woman living out of home has often to face economic difficulties, as salaries are lower for women; but in addition she must often confront the stigmas issuing from traditional ideals on sexuality.

Florentina a 26 year old, had a different experience since her parents were not opposed to her project of moving in with her boyfriend. Nevertheless, her parents thought she was too young for marriage at age 19 and said "You want to get married, are you crazy? Go and live with him but don't get married!". Despite her parent's opinion Florentina followed her wish, marrying in a white dress at church. After two years the couple divorced. Florentina decided to live alone, a difficult decision to make she said. "A woman living alone is improper in Mexico. People believe that you invite men all the time." I asked her if it was perceived as more "decent" since she was divorced. She affirmatively answered that it played a significant role.

It is, then, difficult for women to leave their homes for economic and cultural reasons attached to their gender. It is not surprising that 16 of the 22 women lived at home. Among the six women who had left their families' households, five were in their

late twenties, and four held professional jobs. Their economic situation permitted them to pay a rent that other women could hardly have afforded. They had left their houses for various reasons: For their studies in the case of Elsa and Maya; because of conflicts with their families for Xotchil and Karina; to live with her partner for Karla; and, because she wished to live an independent life for Valeria. The crucial moment to leave the home was, then rarely related to moving in with a partner. This is a difference from the usual ritual where marriage often traces the line for departing home. Nevertheless, many women voiced that their plan was to leave their houses in the near future, in many cases with the wish of sharing their apartment with their girlfriend.

7.2 Relationships with the Home Space

For most of my friends, large amounts of time were spent at home with the family but also outside of the house. Most of these women worked or went to school during the day. If married working women challenge the image of the male provider, as Hubell (1993:3) remarks "single women and women at the head of their household experience much less family and social pressure not to work outside the home." During fieldwork, it was generally expected for women, as daughters, to further their education or have a job. Many had to contribute a certain amount of money to the household economy. This was less common for women of the upper middle class. During interviews, none expressed to be the main provider for the family. The money they brought home was more of a contribution. As the majority of women I met in the *ambiente* had some *preparatoria* (grade 11 to 13), they could expect better jobs than their mothers in many cases.

Salazar Cruz (1999: 157) who studied how working class women in Mexico City manage their space out of the house, points out that daughters are more mobile than women who head households who in turn travel more than wives who generally work near their residence site. She attributes this mobility to the daughters' higher levels of education which permit them to apply for jobs that are often available out of the immediate neighborhood. In addition, the absence of household responsibilities and of a husband who may not allow them go out, contribute to a greater freedom.

As Levine, Correa and Tapia Uribe (1986:9) remark, in their study of women in Cuernavaca, a city near the capital, women who work out of the house are freer from surveillance by husbands, family and the gossip network. This situation permits women an increased degree of independence, including in the field of their sexuality. Due to the size of the city as well, it is not impossible to live an anonymous life. This often permitted women to visit the *ambiente*, after work for example, without arousing any suspicion from their families

The fact that women increasingly spend large amounts of time outside the house, while going to school and working, certainly obliges parents to trust their daughters' judgement. Silvia explains how her mother adjusts to this situation:

Sylvia : I can go back to my house at 3 AM when they let me. Before they would not let them (women), they had a certain hour and if they were not there on time they could kick them out. Now it is more open, even though my mother has her beliefs and all of that, she understands that we are in a different era and that we have to socialise and know other people.

Anahi: Is it difficult for her to understand it ?

Sylvia: Well between brackets what interests her the most is that I don't get pregnant but I tell her that she doesn't have to worry. Ha. Ha. Ha!

As Sylvia suggests, what concerns her mother the most is the risk of pregnancy. Nevertheless, she implies that women's sexuality is not as much under surveillance in this

"different era." Like Sylvia, many women commented that they were more detached from their households than their mothers had been at their age. When I asked what they were allowed to do, that had been prohibited to their mothers, the dichotomy between "la calle" (the streets) and "la casa", (the home) was involved in many of the answers. Young women of the new millennium described going out whenever they wanted while their mothers had to stay at home more often. Nevertheless, I must comment that many of my friends had curfews. *La calle/la casa* division goes beyond the traditional view, where women are exclusively associated with the home while public spaces are identified with masculinity because going to "la calle" does not mean leaving home to go to work or fulfill any responsibility, it is to spend time out for your leisure. As Xia commented to me "Good girls go to school and then they go home, they always get there before 10pm." A popular saying was *Las chicas buenas van al cielo y las chicas malas a todas partes* (Good girls go to heaven, bad girls go everywhere).

However, some women were pressured by their family to spend more time at home since it was what they expected from them as daughters. Sofia was authorized to go out late, every two weeks. Sabina, a 22 year old upper middle class woman, was supposed to go out to work and fulfill her responsibilities but going out for leisure was perceived differently. She had constantly the same reproach from her family saying that she spent too much time out of the house. Sabina was really strong minded and had a boiling temper so she constantly challenged the rule. She often did not return home or appeared at three am, but she lived in an eternal internal struggle since she did not like to disillusion her family.

Whenever they were at home, less than half of the women I interviewed were expected to do more (or all) chores at home than their male siblings. All of them protested or questioned their parents on those requests. Andrea refused to serve her father, while her sister accepted:

Andrea: My dad gets home and says "Give me my meal" so she (my sister) gives him his food, she is his slave and I am not. I rebelled against it one time, I told him: "You know what, I am not your slave, I am your daughter and I am not going to serve your food today or ever in my life." So now when he sees that I come from work, he does not ask me anything anymore.

Women who were unemployed were not expected necessarily to contribute more time to home chores. Eva, did not work and lived with her mother and her aunt at home. She rarely helped at home and continued receiving money from her mother for her personal expenses. Not all unemployed women found themselves in this situation. However, in many cases, instead of wanting them home and help to the chores it was expected from them to go out and find a new job.

This need for multiplying household incomes provides a relative degree of freedom to women, a space detached from the family and the immediate neighborhood. This certainly marks a difference with the traditional situation where women's sexuality is constantly under surveillance.

7.3 Who is Educating Whom ?

Sexual education mainly took place at home, at school and with friends. As sex education is mandatory in elementary school all women had received basic information which, as many said, mainly focussed on reproduction. Many received sex education later

in high school, once again focussing on reproduction but this time often introducing the topic of STDs. If the information remained similar, the styles of presentation varied. Karina who went to a Catholic school was told by the nuns: " You girls are not going to have sex before marriage, because you are decent." On the other hand Xia described that in *secundaria* they discussed about different contraceptive means, and they strongly encouraged the use of the condom if they ever were to practice sex.

The information on sexuality received at home varied as well. Many women said that the topic was in fact taboo and that their mothers, and generally more rarely their fathers, mentioned very little to them. Parents most common advice was "cuidate", meaning take care of yourself. Xia comments here on what her mother told her about sexuality:

Xia: Well the main thing was to take care of myself in relation to sexuality... Because she told me that to be with someone was really nice, to share with someone, but in relation to sex I had to be very careful... About sex, she said that it was something really nice when you are with the right person. She said that I was free to do it when I'll want but I should not regret what I do, so I had to cuidarme (take care of myself).

Elena received very similar advice from her father as she says here:

Elena: [He said] to cuidarme , not to commit any stupidity, not to get pregnant. To cuidarme a lot. That sex should always be enjoyed when two people take the necessary precautions doing it.

In contrast with much of the literature, parents of the women I met, rarely explicitly told their daughters to remain virgin until marriage. Instead the most frequent advice in relation to sexuality was given by the vague word "*cuidarse*". For some families this could mean to remain virgin until marriage nevertheless as Elena and Xia point out above, it mainly stresses the practice of a responsible sexuality. Women were

often told explicitly not to get pregnant but *cuidarse* also meant to be aware of STDs and to have sexual relations with the right person. The fact that parents advice daughters to "Cuidarse" portrays on one hand the traditional idea of sexual practice as a risky behavior for women. Nevertheless, "cuidarse" also contradicts the traditional idea that women's sexuality must be watched because it also underlines how a woman is responsible for her own body. In the end she is the only one who can "cuidarse". Such a statement challenges the traditional notion that women's sexuality must be watched by the family. It certainly reflects the possibility for women in Mexico City to spend large amounts of time outside their houses.

Most advice given by parents assumes a heterosexual practice of sex. At home, scarce information is generally received on same-sex sexuality. Opinions built on social stereotypes are often the image possessed by families. In fact, 73% of Mexicans refuse the possibility of sharing their home with homosexual people (EMV, 1997). This percentage might in fact vary by region, but the perception on same-sex sexuality is often based according to Catholic ideals, traditional psychiatry and morals as the ones disseminated by right wing groups.

Most of the women I interviewed (19/22), as I will further discuss, officially "came out" to some members of their family, if not all. It is difficult to verify how representative it is of women involved in same-sex sexuality, as all these women had a network of support in the *ambiente*. As discussed earlier on, this environment provided ideas and representation on same-sex sexuality, different from the one these women had often grown up with. It is against negative representations that women often face their

families. Sofia describes that the vision her mother had on homosexuality was rather negative:

Sofia: She did not talk that much about homosexuality...at the most she talked about gay men. "Look how this puto walks". It was really homophobic...She thought that it was something wrong something that they convert you to, that they brain wash you... She only knew two lesbians, two tortilleras but tortilleras that really made tortillas. So she thought that all lesbians were like this. I mean machoras and women beaters and that kind of stuff.

While parents are usually perceived as the educators, in the case of same-sex sexuality, women often commented that they had to educate their parents about it. Andrea discusses her experience:

Andrea: The information they had on homosexuality was all wrong... I have had to educate them on the theme and my sister too and my aunts and all of my family.[If they said] "They are a bunch of maricones" I said, "Wait a second, they are not maricones, they are homosexuals." Like this, I am always correcting them, always, that the word has to be like this or like that because maricones is a label that people have given them.

Diana also said that she educated her mother when I asked her what her mother taught her regarding same-sex sexuality:

Diana: I have been teaching her some things, she has learned a lot from me... Books, magazines, pamphlet, talks. But that she taught me something, the only thing she taught me was that I should think wrong about homosexuality.

In September 2000 the book "Papa, Mama Soy Gay" was launched in Mexico City. This book was addressed to parents with a daughter or a son identifying as "gay". Many of my friends wanted to invite their parents to the event, usually their mother. As in the case of Diana, in addition to discussions, the use of documentation is made by some women in order to give parents a different perspective on same-sex sexuality. The documents often come from LGBT organizations dedicated to the defense of human rights, some magazines addressing sexuality issues or books. Many women also

encouraged their parents to take part in a support group for parents of gay and lesbian people.

The assumption that sex involves a male and a female confuses parents on what kind of advice to give their daughters. Sofia's mother was unsure on what to tell her daughter about sexuality, now that she knew of her sexual preference:

Sofia: She did not talk about sex that much, if she talked about the theme it was like "Don't get pregnant"... Now that I've told her that I am gay, well one time she told me "I don't know how to advise you, how do you take care of yourself (cuidarse), what do you do?"

Nevertheless, some parents intend to give a sexual education free of discrimination against same-sex sexuality. Isabel's mother has a positive image of same-sex sexuality. In her case, this respect seems to come from her closeness to gay and lesbian identified people.

Isabel: She made respectful comments. When we lived in Guadalajara we were part of a gay scene. My mom is a cosmetologist. In the congresses there were lots of lesbians and gays, many stylists and all of that. She had many friends. Even one of her associates lived with his partner. So she learned to respect them. She realized that in the end they were people that lived well and had a good education... So she always had a lot of respect, especially because of their constant fight against what people say.

On one occasion I was at *Mujeres Unidas* when Claudia, a sixteen year old woman from Neza (a working class neighborhood) visited. She was extremely nervous and shy when she first came through the door. It was her first time at the organization. Paula and I discussed with her, and so did another woman who was present at the moment. Paula answered all of her questions and when we asked her how she had heard of *Mujeres Unidas* she said that her mother had brought her:

Claudia: I came because my mom brought me. I did not want to come, I had told her [about my sexual preference]. The next day she said let's go, get dressed and she started to get dressed and put her make up on. I was afraid and she told me "You have to learn to face your fears" She drove me to the corner. I was not going to come in but then she told me andale (let's go) and I came in and that's it.

Volunteers at *Mujeres Unidas* mentioned that some mothers came to the space to ask for advice or resources on how to help their daughters or themselves. Some of them even participated in the workshops. Sonia, an eighteen year old, had her mother accompanying her to the dance workshop. She wanted her to be familiarized with this environment frequented by her daughter.

As many women commented, parents were not the only ones to introduce ideas on gender and sexuality in the family. In fact, daughters often voiced their own ideas. As many pointed out they had to "educate" their parents on other ways of thinking on same-sex sexuality. This dynamic questions power relations which take place in the household. Who is entitled to introduce ideas in the family and have them accepted by other members ? To which extent is marrying and being a mother the only avenue to acquire power in the family and the community ? As Levine, Correa and Uribe (1986:183) discuss, younger urban women controlling their reproductive lives, extending their formal education and aspiring to become economically self-reliant, challenge traditional notions of husband and wife relations "and refuse to endure infidelity, neglect, physical violence and other forms of abuse." Wouldn't these women challenge as well, other traditional notions of family relationships ? In Mexico, education has been found as the most significant variable to have an influence on more egalitarian family relations, more satisfaction with those arrangements and lower violence risks (Hogan, 1994 cited in Garcia Guzman 1999: 134). As all women I interviewed had at least *preparatoria* education, it is perhaps not surprising that they confront their families on their ideas on same-sex sexuality.

More specifically, parent-children relations seem to have become more egalitarian in these past decades. My grandmother addressed her parents with the pronoun "usted" (you), which is generally reserved for respected people. By contrast, my mother and other women, who grew up among the generations which took part in October 1968 events, used "tu" (you) for their parents, which denotes equality. It is then expected that parents and children will disagree on certain issues, and adjust to each other's expectations. Nevertheless, the sentence "As long as you live under my roof, you have to conform to these rules." is not so rare and implies that parents still hold a certain authority in the household.

Some parents impose more fiercely their ideas and decisions over their children. For some women I met, discussing their sexual preference at home is unthinkable. As it is difficult to leave the family house, for some women there were not many choices other than to live up to the expectations of their parents, or other family members. Besides monetary issues there are also emotional issues at stake. Many women spoke of how important were their families for them. In fact, according to a survey on values in Mexico, 85% of respondents considered that the family had most importance in their lives, compared to work (67%), religion (34%) and friends (25%) (EMV, 1991). The rejection of same-sex sexuality is drastic in certain families. An acquaintance had found her suitcase at the door of her house, shortly after having announced to her parents her sexual preference. Before being understood by her mother, Nadia was sent to an asylum after "coming out" to her mother. Her sexual preference was not the only motive. Nadia had been having different troubles but it was in the course of this event that her mother decided to bring her to the institution. The medical vision of homosexuality, where it is

seen as a disease, remains in Mexico. In effect other women at Mujeres Unidas had friends who had been sent to the psychiatrist or even interned for voicing their sexual preference. In September, a woman came to Mujeres Unidas asking for advice. Her father had found a letter from her lover. He had literally told her that he would kill her if she is a lesbian. The woman believed him capable of such an act and came desperate for advice.

Fortunately, for most women I interviewed there is a possibility for discussing and living their sexual preference at home. Nevertheless, that is not to say that the dialogue is equally open with all members, different type of relations take place, and various webs of power are knitted between family members, as we shall see.

7.4 Fathers. Mothers, Siblings and the Extended Family

Isabel invited me once to play guitar at her house. I went in the middle of the afternoon to her central neighborhood near the central market of *La Merced*. Her dad was sitting in the large dining room table and having lunch in television's company. He gave me the impression to be a silent man. Isabel brought me to the kitchen, lifted the lid of a casserole full of spaghetti and asked me if I wanted some. It smelled so good that I could not resist. I felt strange when Isabel and I sat at the wood table on the seats at the other extreme from her father. While I wondered why there was such a distance, we talked randomly about the thousand similarities and differences between Canada and Mexico. The only words that her dad placed in the conversation were that I should put some Tabasco on the meal he had cooked, it enhanced the flavor of it. In the middle of the conversation Isabel told me "Here, it is 100% *buga*, do you understand that?" She did not want me to mention anything that could build a suspicion from her father, regarding her sexual preference. It also meant that her father did not know the meaning of *buga*

(heterosexual) that is generally used by people that are familiar with *el ambiente*. After the meal, we went to the kitchen and she whispered to me “You know violence in a family is not only physical”. She added that they all lived in the same house but they did not really talk to her father. “I don’t care what he thinks or says anymore”, concluded Isabel. Later on, we went to play guitar and composed arrangements on a song. After a moment of practice she said “Let’s ask my mother’s opinion.” Her mother came to her room and listened to us playing and criticized some elements. Isabel said that her mother’s opinion was always important. The relationship with her mother was obviously much closer.

Even though relationships with fathers do not necessarily go to the extreme where silence prevails, the distant relationship that Isabel has with her father, and the close one she maintains with her mother depict traditional family relations in Mexico as they have been described multiple times throughout the anthropological literature. Fathers have often been portrayed as distant while mother and children form the heart of the family. As Adler-Lomnitz (1977:94) proposes, women in Mexico develop closer relations with their children and their own parents and siblings. While for men, their male friends may be closer to them than their wives are.

The little participation of fathers in child rearing has been contested in new studies on masculinities. As Mirande (1998), points out in his study on Mexican and Latino men who live in the US, fatherhood occupies an important place in the life of men he interviewed. Guttman (1996:85), also observes that men in *colonia* Santo Domingo, take an important place in parenting.

In the light of interviews, women's communication with their fathers is rather poor. In no case were fathers found to be the first ones to know of their daughter's sexual preference. Instead they are the last members of the family to be informed, or in many cases they do not know while the rest of the family is aware of the situation.

The apparent father-daughter miscommunication reflects above all the common silence on the topic of sexuality, as interviews mainly explore this specific theme. In effect, as Karina points out, she never discussed with her father the topic of sexuality that was already rarely touched by her mother:

Karina: When he (father) died, I was 17... if my mother did not talk of these topics, my father did even less. He never talked to me about anything. Nothing. Not about religion, or sex or dating or anything. He never discussed the topic... We talked about how my mother made us suffer all, but about personal themes, never, nothing...How strange I don't know what we talked about, we talked about a tale, a movie, a book, but never about our every day lives.

Only for a few of them, were their fathers more open to discussing sexuality than their mothers. As Elena expresses her mother never talked of the theme. She attributes this situation to the religious beliefs of her mother and to her personality as she labels her as a cold woman. By contrast, Elena describes her father as much more open to the topic of sexuality. She also believes that he would have been much more understanding than her mother regarding her sexual preference. Here she recalls the initial reaction of her mother, after announcing that her husband caught her having an affair with a woman:

Elena: So I told her everything and said "It's because he saw me with a woman, I'm going out with a woman." No, she could not believe what I was saying... Well she was the only one I told because I did not have any other option. I believe that my father would have been more accessible, he would have understood me better than my mom does. My mother completely freaked out, [she said] that I was so stupid, how was it possible that I had done this.

Elena's greater closeness to her father than to her mother was rather rare among my friends. This does not mean that daughters did not spend any time with their fathers or that no signs of affection were demonstrated, but conversations concerning love and sexuality do not appear to be so common between them.

The mother- daughter relation varied greatly according to family history, nevertheless a great majority reports that communication with their mothers is more frequent. Once again this can be related to the main topic of the interview. In effect, information on sexuality is mainly passed on by mothers to their daughters. For women who grew up with their aunts or older sisters, these persons are often the ones in the family who gave information on sexuality. Gutmann (1996: 73) describes how some families in *colonia Santo Domingo*, see fathers as being responsible for teaching boys certain "men skills". Mothers as well should teach their daughters "women skills". Similarly, for women, discussions on love and/or sexuality with a parent seem to mainly take place with the mother.

At the heart of the family, mothers are often the first ones to know about their daughter's sexual preference, even though this priority often alternates with siblings or aunts. Mothers are seen as an important symbol in Mexico, often represented by the national figure of the Virgen de Guadalupe. Even though I doubt that all mothers wish to live up to these ideas in Mexico City, mothers are seen as the main person responsible to raise children and must ensure their education at all cost. According to the anthropologist Marit Melhuus's study of Mexican femininity (1992), when a child misbehaves it is the mother who is blamed (cited in Prieur, 1998:56). However, families were also sometimes

finger pointed as the expression “Una familia de locos” (A family of crazy people), exhibits. This expression implies that a family is “crazy”, therefore dysfunctional, and has a negative impact on the children's upbringing. But as many of my friends pointed out, many mothers felt guilty after their “coming out”. “What did I do wrong?”, is a question that many mothers asked after hearing of their daughters' sexual preference. Xia's mother felt guilty for many months as she explains:

Xia: It was very hard for my mother. She spent half a year traumatized and she still insists that it is her fault. And because of ...my father's rejection of us and that I am mad at him... But that's not it, it's not the fault of anybody, because you are born like this, you are like this, it is no one's fault. It was very hard for her. And now she understands but she was feeling very bad.

Anahi: And suddenly she told you I understand you or what?

Xia: No, it was not suddenly: “I understand you.” Instead she suddenly started making comments like “Oh look at this girl, you don't like her?” I thought that it was very strange and I could not talk about it with her. And it started like this and one day she said “It's ok, I love you very much, whatever you are I love you and I will support you.” And from there it has been fine, now I talk a lot with her and she knows if I love someone or if something took place with someone, she knows everything. It's great I can talk “Oh guess what happened, I met a girl...” It's very nice.

Anahi: And you talked with her before or it has made you closer?

Xia: No, before it was like... I mean I have always loved my mother and listened to her problems. But I only talked to her about school, my friends, but friends, I did not tell her [more]. No, this really opened everything.

Xia's narration on “coming out” to her mother, strangely resembled the one of many. As she explains, the relationship with her mother improved a couple of months after discussing her sexual preference. This new situation led to discussions on her love life.

Traditionally, parents desire for their daughter a man from a good family and who has good career prospects. Between two women, no one is required to support the other economically. Nevertheless, Andrea believes that the family (usually of the upper

classes) still expects that their daughter will go out with a woman of the same social class.

Andrea: To be with a woman is to be at the same level. I mean you are not more important than she is and she is not more important than you are. If she has a certain degree, a master or a Ph.D. you have to hurry up, you have to be at the same level as she is, for you, for your family, for society, for you... God, family is like "What kind of studies do you have miss? What is your occupation?" "Well I'm a sweeper", "How is my daughter who is a doctor from Harvard going to be with a sweeper? So parents start pressuring the daughter "My daughter, how is it possible that you are going out with a sweeper and you being a doctor from Harvard." So they put pressure. "No, I love her like this" And the mother "No, no, no" Even though you love your partner, this idea stays in mind... So she starts having relation with someone from work "Ah and Susanita has the same degrees as me and she is beautiful... I'm going to leave the sweeper for Susanita." So you have to fulfill certain requisites to be at the same level and not be left. For everything to stay in place, for you to feel well and feel well with everybody else.

Mothers, particularly, discussed their impressions of their daughters girlfriends.

Yadeli's mother expressed her worries, when her daughter was dating Eva. Rumors had reached her saying that Eva went to bars very often and took drugs. At the time Yadeli was sharing an apartment with a friend. After her mother expressed her worries, on her daughter's relationship and new life style. Yadeli moved back home at the demands of her mother. She wished to be in good terms with her mother and did not like her to worry.

My friends usually refer to the mother of their *pareja* as their *suegra* (mother-in-law). Many people also comment that their partner is seen as another daughter at home. Mothers often call them *hija* (daughter). Ana Maria, lived for two years with her mother and her girlfriend at home. She recalls how well her mother and Martha got along:

Ana Maria: My mother adored her... She was in my house all the time and she had the keys to it. My room was not my room anymore. I had all her things in there... My mom told her things that she did not even tell me. Sometimes I woke up and they were having breakfast together... They got along really, really well...

In Mexico City, it is common in the working and lower middle classes for the wives of the sons to move in with their husband's family. However, most women dreamt

about living in an apartment with their partner but I encountered three women whose partners had lived at home with the family.

During fieldwork I met in the *ambiente* very few women in their twenties who had children. Among the ones I interviewed, only two are mothers. Eli lived with her mother and her two sons who were one and four years old. Eli had her first son when she was 15 years old. Her parents forced her to marry the father of her children, whom she divorced three years later. For the moment, Eli wished to keep her attraction for women secret from her sons. She explains her reasons:

Eli: My relationship in front of my sons remains buga. They still see their father. They are two boys so it is the image. In this society of machistas... it is important to teach them that a woman deserves respect whether she is buga or gay... A child who sees his mother kiss another woman is going to think that it is very common to kiss with a boy at school and that's going to cause him psychological problems. Those are things you have to think about. Then when they will have the age to understand it, of course I'm thinking of telling them... the way things will go, I mean I could say at 14 but who knows?

At the time of the interview, Eli believed her sons were too young to know of her sexual preference. A couple of weeks later I saw her with her mother and her two sons in a lesbian cafe. Isabel, her girlfriend, at the time, sat with the 4 year old, while her mother took care of the younger son. Eli joked around the fact that Isabel looked good as a mother. Unfortunately, I did not question Eli, as to whether she had changed her mind on her educational plans for her sons.

Elena, who had a son and a daughter, lived with her mother as well. However, her husband had kept the children since he believed that Elena could not take care of the children. Elena remembers the painful events that led her to lose her children, after her husband found out her sexual preference.

Elena: *[He said] "Why didn't you talk to me?" "Well, yeah, I guess I'm guilty about not having talked about it."... I was crying because I felt like shit for what I did to him and my children... So then after he said "You know what I don't want to make it worse because I have you on tape, I have pictures of you...I mean, he had done everything ... He said "You know what, you are going to leave the house and the children. I'm going to take the children from you because your environment cannot be the children's one. I don't want the children to be exposed to your environment. If you are like this OK, but you are not going to involve my children". I was by myself and I had to decide. And back then, there was no one around me who could tell me "Come on bring the kids and don't worry." I mean no one! Not my mother nor anybody else, I was alone. I felt broken, I didn't know what to do. My children, my life, what do I do?. They will take my children what will I do, how will I tell my parents that they took the children from me. For which reason, what do I do? I did not know how to tell my mother, my mother so difficult, so dry...I mean what do you expect from your mother in such moments, you hope everything from her, don't you? I said, what do I do, not even a friend, no one. Women from the ambiente did not know. The woman [I was dating] was 20, how could she help me ? She did not work, she was studying, what could she do ? I mean I was not working myself, I did not know how to do anything. [My husband worked]. Me, by myself with my children, where do I go ? I felt trapped.*

As, Elena says, she had not many other choices than to bend to her husband's black mail. She was unable to support her children economically and the absence of a network of support also played an important role. In Mexico, whenever a divorce takes place, the woman is more often the one who remains with the children. However, Elena, "lost" her mother title, as if identifying as a lesbian and being a mother was incompatible in the eyes of her husband, but as well of her surroundings. As discussed, traditionally, mothers are highly regarded in Mexico but for Elena this means of valuing herself was now closed. With all her heart, Elena wanted to live with her children, but be it the case, she would not disclose her sexual preference to them. She later said: "I already had not given them a family. If I tell them "You know want my son [I am gay]" Imagine!"

Like Elena and Eli many women believe that it is not appropriate for children to be exposed to the *ambiente*. However, this is far from being the only opinion. During a discussion session on family at *La casa de Frida*, most women believed that it is not

problematic for children to grow up with a lesbian mother, or mothers. One of the participants commented that it was not correct to hold secrets from children because it would give the message that it was wrong for a woman to be attracted to women. In the course of interviews, Paula who affirmed that she did not want children, said that if life took a different twist she could ensure the education of a child as well as any other person. As she says: "I'm not worried about what people can say or the education that we can give her/him..."

If ties with the mother are often close, the ones between siblings are perceived as ones to be relied on. Once again this varies with family histories but in general siblings are to be trusted. They are often the first ones to be informed of their sister's sexual preference when it is not the mother or an aunt. Sisters, more particularly, are often aware of the situation. Brothers often know as well, but it is more common for one of them to be unaware of their sister sexual preference. Love and sexuality will usually be discussed with siblings openly as friends do, particularly with sisters. Paulina, a 26 year old middle class woman, shared a room with her sister. When Paulina's girlfriend stayed over, her sister would always move to another room in order to leave them a space of intimacy.

Maya was one of the few who had been rejected by her sister when she told her about her sexual preference. Since the rest of her family lives in Sonora, she does not see them very often. However, she bitterly remembers the cold hug she received at her graduation from her older sister, Marianna. For many years Maya shared the same room with Marianna. Her sister felt uncomfortable with the degree of closeness they had in the bedroom. Maya was hurt by her sister's ideas "She is my sister how could I be attracted

to her?" Maya hopes that her sister will be more understanding with time. Her three other sisters had no problem in accepting the situation. Her two brothers remained unaware of Maya's love life.

Siblings often help each other. Andrea's sister used to cover up for her when she went out with her *pareja*. When her parents asked where Andrea was, her sister always answered for her. Paula's brother also took care of the situation when rumors spread about her sister. He defended Paula by giving a positive image of her to people who gossiped. This situation illustrates the traditional bond described as protective, between brothers and sisters. Adriana, a 19 year old lower middle class woman, also narrated a story where her brother exhibited protective behavior. Adriana announced her sexual preference to her older brother, Mateo, when she broke up with her girlfriend. Adriana arrived at her brother's apartment with tears in her eyes. Mateo hugged her and instinctively knew that these were the tears of a broken heart. He asked her if they had done something unfair to her. She answered yes. Mateo raised his voice and said "I am going to smash his face, who is he?" Adriana answered "You can't." Her brother did not understand why until, after a long silence, Adriana continued "You can't because it is a woman." Mateo was surprised but accepted the situation immediately. It was out of the question to use physical violence to make her pay for her faults. Mateo's reaction implies that women must be protected by men, especially by males of the family. Fathers also proved to be protective of their daughters, particularly when they had a boyfriend. Nevertheless, in a relationship between women, men are not entitled to interfere, at least physically, as they would thus challenge this same traditional belief where women must be protected by men. If an intervention occurs it is mostly focused on not permitting their

daughter to see a woman, but it seems less probable that a brother or a father will confront a woman who hurt or "dishonored" their sister or daughter.

When I asked women how their family reacted in relation to their sexual preference, they usually answered in relation to the entire extended family when I had intended the question for the nuclear family. Many extended families meet very often. Whenever I went to a friend's house it was not rare that their aunt, uncle, cousins etc. were visiting or even lived there. It is not then very surprising that many women comment that the first person in their family with whom they discussed their sexual preference is an aunt. In very large families, aunts sometimes have the same age as their nieces but older aunts can also be important confidants. Relationships with cousins often resemble the ones with siblings, therefore cousins are also often confidants.

Many of my friends bring their partners to family reunions. During a family party Juliana danced with Gabriela all songs, as her cousins danced with their partners who were present. Nevertheless, it is socially accepted for women to dance together, while two men would be regarded as suspicious. While it seems that many of my friends did not wear a facade in front of the extended family, it could also be read that they performed behaviors that were in fact accepted. Among interviewees only one woman answered, without doubts, that she would kiss her partner at a family party. Most of them responded like Xia: "If it was my real, real, real *pareja*, like she is my woman and they respect her, and they will understand, then yes." Some supposed that their families were not ready to see such a graphic image of their attraction for women. Inviting your partner to family reunions and dancing with her were acceptable, but kissing often went beyond

the admissible. Andrea, the only one who would kiss her *pareja* in such a situation found the experience frustrating when her aunts asked her about her “friend” when they all perfectly knew the nature of their relationship. “Why can’t they say it?” asked Andrea.

Sexual preference often becomes an open secret among family members, more particularly during intergenerational events. For many of my friends, commenting on how nice and smart their new date is might not be the most common topic at Christmas dinner table. On the other hand during small gatherings it is not rare for the topic to be brought up. Sitting at the table with Karla, her mother and her brother, Karla discussed how a woman had approached her the night before at a restaurant.

In November 2001, Isabel became engaged to Monica, whom she had met a year earlier. Isabel organized a *despedida de soltera* (bridal shower) at her home in which family and friends brought gifts to the couple. Many of her friends from the *ambiente* and also old school friends, were present. Among the members of her family, her sister and her husband, and their two daughters participated. Her mother, her sister-in-law and some cousins also attended the event. Unfortunately I did not ask Isabel if she had invited her father and brothers or they had not come to the celebration. Traditionally, only women participate in the bridal shower, but Isabel had invited men and women as she said that these were her best friends.

Sometimes the family becomes another universe, in addition to the *ambiente* where sexual preference can be lived freely, but out of these spaces secrecy is forced. In effect, parents and other family members will often tolerate their daughter's sexual preference but ask for secrecy outside the family. The “Que diran?” (What will they say?)

from neighbors and friends remains the fear of many families, particularly parents. As mentioned, this fear is attached to the view that bad parenting is at the source of a same-sex sexual preference. Nevertheless, the fear of other opinions does not seem to count for most women, as most of them answered that they would kiss a woman in a city bus, or in a neighborhood street. The opinion of the family is much more important to them, as important emotional and often economic issues might be at stake.

Although many women freely live their sexual preference at home, there are borders surrounding the spaces and the people around whom it is performed. This illustrates the complex web of power relations and ideological affiliations that may exist within the same household.

7.5 Chosen Families

In the middle of July I was getting tired of going out to bars so often and having small conversations in a space where music was too loud to express everything that was on my mind. Even though I was constantly surrounded by people, I felt the need for deeper friendships, people with whom I could talk about everything. This wish made, there must have been an angel listening because the next day I received a call from Paulina. She asked me if I wanted to go for coffee with her and three other friends. There was a really good dynamic between the four of us. Mari was 39, the three others were 26 and I was 25. Since Mari was older we teased her by saying that she was our mother and we were her daughters. Everybody took part in what I thought to be a game but after I realized that it was fairly common in *el ambiente*. We often discussed how the fact of calling each other *hermana* (sister) or mother for Mari, brought us much closer in a really short period of time. We shared profound ideas in that space of trust that we were establishing. These

roles were taken seriously: on my birthday Mari bought me a new pair of shoes. One night when we went for coffee Paulina confessed to us that she had broken up with her girlfriend three months ago. Something that she had been holding to herself since she did not have the heart to discuss with anybody. This tie was presented sometimes to exterior people. When I went to Paulina's work in a government building, she told everybody that I was her sister. Some people believed her and others questioned it since we don't look alike, but she was affirmative in her statement. The fictive family reached an end because of fictive incest. Maya and Marina started dating each other, an affair that rapidly ended, and Marina had to stop spending time with us since she felt heart broken. Paulina and I were much more attached to our sister roles since we had been attracted to each other for several months but had not acted on it since we took seriously the nature of our fictive tie. When we finally started dating each other we realized what both of us had been saying to ourselves, "I cannot have anything with her: she is my sister!"

The family we had created reminded me of Kath Weston's *Families We Choose* (1997). In her book, Weston (1997:3) explores, how a discourse on gay families developed during the 1980's, and what "family" means and has meant to lesbians and gay men in the US. "These gay families were often chosen families as opposed to biological families where members share blood ties.

While the world of advertisement, video clips and fashion projects individualistic and materialistic values in the federal district; families must develop different values and remain together due to the economic situation. Relying on your blood family becomes a key asset for survival. As Andrea and many other women affirmed, their family is their priority in their lives:

Andrea: *First it is my family because of everything they have given to me, because they are my principal support. Then comes work because I generate an income for my family and my partner. My partner comes last because it is something important but relationships can be hard.*

Which place do these chosen families take, then, in the life of my friends? As mentioned above, a space of trust is established in those families and loyalty and mutual help are generally expected. Isabel who called me *hermanito* (little brother) had also two fathers, Veronica and Lena. They refused to be called mom and dad since they said it reflected the social stereotype where there is an active and a passive in same-sex relationships. Therefore, they opted for father and father as Lena said she could not imagine being called "mama" because of her masculine appearance. Isabel confessed that she often asked for advice from Lena when she needed it. The bond that Isabel shared with Lena and Veronica seemed to fulfill emotional needs, as Isabel could always trust her fathers for advice and support. Isabel could also speak with her "blood" family but, as she said she often went to Lena for advice. Traditionally mothers are supposed to advise daughters and fathers sons, for supposedly having gone through similar experiences. In a similar way, Lena who was in her thirties had experienced the *ambiente*, much more than Isabel who was in her early twenties.

In my own experience, having sisters made me feel that I had someone to rely on. My friends echoed my thoughts. However, when problems arose with Marina who felt heart broken for Maya, our family ties did not pass the test of persistency. Marina insistently came to the café where we all hung out, even though Maya and she felt uncomfortable in each other's presence. Addressing the problem, Mari suggested that Marina had taken this "jueguito" (little game) a bit too far. She justified Marina's behavior saying that she had problems with her family and that she took the chosen

family "too seriously". Mari's comments proposed that there is a difference between blood families and chosen families, which she considered to be less serious. During fieldwork, I did not encounter any long-term chosen families with the exception of Paty and Marisela. The pair called each other sister. In appearance, Paty was in her forties while Marisela in her twenties. I met them through Mari, as they were involved in the same political party. When Marisela joined us for a beer, Paty introduced her as her sister. I did not question anything until Paty mentioned that they had been neighbors for several years. Then Paty revealed the chosen aspect of their tie in saying "This woman is like my little sister." Marisela warmly smiled to Paty and patted her shoulder demonstrating affection.

A difference with blood families is that there is generally no space assigned to those families. We went out on our leisure times and called each other by our different kinship terms. These families offered more emotional support than economic support. They certainly provided a space to speak of same-sex sexuality issues freely when it was not always possible to do so at home. Karla was an exception since she lived with a friend who identified as a gay male and they used several kinship terms to refer to each other. In front of friends, Karla called David her son. Karla, who has a dominant personality, also organized things in the apartment and administrated chores of the week for her "son". David often teased her to also organize his life. In front of neighbors and building administrators Karla called David "husband". This title corresponded more to what people in their surroundings expected from a man and a woman living together. It also granted them some privileges such as the one of living in their apartment. In effect,

the administration only wanted to rent to married couples or [blood] families. Such renting politics are not rare in Mexico City.

While some of my friends had chosen families, it is difficult to argue that this was strictly characteristic of the *ambiente*. A difference with Weston's (1997) findings is that I did not encounter a generalized idea in the *ambiente* stipulating that many gay and lesbians define their families as chosen, rather than only "biological". When I became more interested in the topic and I began to question people, many women had never heard of chosen families. "*Que raro*" (How strange), said Eva when I told her that Mari was my mother, and Paulina, Maya and Marina were my sisters.

Perhaps other Mexico City inhabitants would not have been so surprised, as I have come across other examples in the anthropological literature where chosen families operate. In the *Meaning of Macho*, Gutmann (1996: 250) narrates how his neighbor who took care of her daughter, became the grandmother. Other members of this same family, consequently became uncle, aunt etc. Gutmann affirms that the relationship with Angela, the grandmother, has remained much the same as the one his family holds with the other grandparents. Similarly, in *Mema's House*, Prieur (1998) mentions that the young *jotas* (~ homosexual male) who lived with Mema, called him *abuelita* (grandmother). Since the *jotas* were 20 or 30 year younger than Mema, it is not surprising that they had opted for this title. Prieur, nevertheless, never catalogs the members of the household as a chosen family. Whether in the *ambiente* or not, it remains difficult to specify how common chosen families are in Mexico City, in a society where blood ties are of a prime importance.

Contrary to the stereotype, chosen families formed by friends are not the only option out of the "biological" family. As same-sex marriage remains illegal in Mexico, it is for the moment impossible to form a legal family. Andrea affirmed that her family is the most important for her, but she also believes that if she has a more serious relationship it will become her priority as it will be her family:

Andrea: If something becomes more formal...if I live with her and there is a similar relationship to what you have in a marriage...[then it will be] first my partner, then work and then my family.

When I asked women if they would like to form their own (traditional) family with a partner or children in the future, most of them answered that they would eventually like to live with a stable partner. Concerning children, most of them believed that they would think about it if they had a really stable partner. However, it did not seem to be a priority in their lives as the most common answer was, as Xia says: "If she wants children we can have them."

Elsa, had been going out with her partner Berenice, for six years. Berenice had two children from a previous marriage. I met Euzebe, 5 years old, and Elisa, 7 years old, when I arrived to Elsa's apartment for the interview. I pressed the buzzer of this fancy apartment building in *Colonia Narvarte*. Elsa rapidly came down the hall and invited me to come in. Berenice and her children were having afternoon lunch. They invited me to join them for their *tacos de bisteck* meal. We started chatting about my research but the conversation took a very different direction when Elisa, began speaking of her day at school. Elsa complained that Euzebes was not eating anything, and she urged the boy to finish his plate. The 5 year old protested but obeyed to Elsa. Berenice did not live in this apartment, but they daily ate together as Elsa picked up the children at school while she

was still at work. Later on in the interview, Elsa confessed that Berenice and her were planning to move together. As other mothers I interviewed, Berenice and Elsa were concerned on the consequences of their same-sex relationship on the children. In part, for this reason the couple had not taken a final decision yet as to know if they would live together.

7.6 Conclusion

For women of the *ambiente* the family holds a very important place in their lives. As the economic situation has worsened, children tend to remain with their families longer. In addition, traditional ideas on sexuality place women under the protection of the family until marriage, which often marks the moment of departure. Even though they often remain at home, these educated women are strongly mobile, which leaves them a space to manage their own life out of the home, including in the area of sexuality.

At home, mothers principally speak to their daughters of the theme of sexuality. Nevertheless, ideas on sexuality do not only circulate from parent/tutor to daughter, but often the opposite is true as well, especially when the topic of same-sex sexuality is debated. This interaction, certainly speaks of power within the family. The fact, that women can debate and perform their ideas on sexuality at home, reveals that daughters (at least the ones I knew) do not only pertain to the margins at home. This also echoes broader changes on what it means today to be a woman in Mexico City. In effect, for women, becoming a wife and a mother does not seem to be the only route to power anymore. Nevertheless, power differences and the variety of ideological affiliations can

still be perceived within the same household, as discussing and performing same-sex sexuality might take the form of an open secret in front of some family members.

While relations with the "blood family" are important for my friends. Some of them also have chosen families. I mainly discussed the one constituted of friends who share kinship ties. Those families often offer an emotional support. Nonetheless, I did not find a generalized idea that gays and lesbians had a distinct type of family from that of the general population. Most interviewees, mentioned that they wished to share their life someday with a woman. Being a mother was not a priority for the majority of them. For their part, they would form their own families with their *pareja*.

Chapter 8: Three Testimonies

Until now I have located female same-sex sexuality in relation to dominant ideas on gender and sexuality. I have nevertheless, attempted to present the voices of women on their own sexuality, by including interview extracts. Nevertheless, my interpretations, have been very present in between their voices.

In this second part of the thesis I present three stories, in which women speak of their lives. I minimally intervene, so the story teller and the reader enter in contact with one another. This contact, is however always to be partial, as the translation certainly alters the meaning, and the corporeal performance that was delivered with speech is not present. As discussed, these voices have been produced in the context of an interview. Therefore it is important to acknowledge the intersubjective character of these testimonies. Upon reflection these stories seem to focus more on the topic of sexuality, than any other aspects of their lives. This is comprehensible as the interview often oriented the conversation towards this direction. In addition, as women knew that my research mainly concerns this theme, they also often responded in relation to this perspective. So these life stories could rather be called, "sexual life stories".

Nonetheless, these narratives are interesting as they have the power to underline sexual subjectivities, an aspect of the life of Latin American women, that has received very little attention in academic writing. Narration can be seen as a practice that appropriates, reinscribes, decodes and/or subverts dominant ideas of sexuality, desire and gender. Many parallels can be established between life histories and autobiographies. As Buckton (1998:1) explains in relation to autobiography: "As a genre exploring the possibility of representing forms of subjective experience, autobiography offers rich

opportunities for apprehending the ways in which the self is conceived of and constituted". However, one has to remember that this "self" is never independent of or exists prior to the telling of life history but it is also to some extent produced by this sense-making act (Ochs, 1997:185) .

As Ruth Behar (1993) questions in relation to Esperanza's story, does the anthropologist choose the story teller, or does the story teller, choose her ? In my case, I chose these three stories because Andrea, Diana and Paula, provided me detailed information on their lives in the course of the interview. However, they were the ones who chose to tell their stories, in the way they did. In this sense they chose me, rather than the contrary.

In their life stories, recurrent patterns appear, but the presence of schisms is also evident. The preceding chapters come alive in their stories, giving life to the diverse deconstructed pieces of text that I have been presenting. I now give place to their voices.

8.1 Diana

Diana is twenty-five years old, she is the eldest of two. She finished her *preparatoria* (high school) and works currently as an assistant graphic designer. She has lived all her life in Mexico City and shares a home with her mother, a nurse, and her younger brother in the district of Tlalpan. Her family is Catholic by tradition but they do not actively practice the religion. Her story is constructed on the bases of a three hour interview that took place in a cafe and from field notes recorded in the course of participant observation.

I met Diana, during the 23rd Mexico City gay pride parade. Xia, a woman whom I met an hour before, introduced me to Diana and her best friend Sabina. While Xia and Sabrina developed an intense conversation, Diana and I walked together. I remember her dressed with beige cargo pants, a loose white T-shirt and black leather shoes. She wore her long brown hair in a ponytail. Diana and I got along well, chatting the entire afternoon about our impressions of the parade. In the course of fieldwork, Diana and I developed a strong friendship. I went to her house on many occasions and met her family.

One day of July, Diana invited me to a birthday party for her uncle. Since it was late and I lived far, her mother welcomed me to stay at their house that night. In the taxi, Diana said to me “my house is not big but I happily offer it to you”. Diana lives in the Southern mountains circling the urban center. The taxi drove through the hills until we could see the lights of the entire city; a yellow patch breaking the pitch black tranquility of the night. Diana paid for the taxi and we engaged our walk through a narrow earthen path. My friend extended her hand to help her mother and me climb the steep passages leading to her house. A fence circled the patio of the small brick house where we entered.

We first went through the empty living room and then entered the kitchen. Next to an old Sony stereo, I could recognize the posters of the popular signers *Monica Naranjo* and *Luis Miguel*. The kitchen table was in the center of the room and on a top corner there were little statues of *Jesus* and *La Virgen*. Then we went to the one bedroom they all shared together. Diana and her younger brother shared a bunk bed, while their mother slept in a king size bed. In the room they had two televisions, a VCR and a Playstation. It was a modest house but it contained many electronic devices. Diana informed me later that her brother and she, paid for them with their earnings. They had in fact grown up with only one black and white television in the house. During the interview, Diana affirmed to me that she deeply loves her family. She describes the dynamic with her mother and brother:

We go to the movies, we go to the park, we talk, we play, and coming back from work my mother asks us how was our day. She takes care of us, then we start play fighting on the bed as if we were children. We get along really well. Luckily since I had a serious talk with my mother, we have a good relationship. My brother knows where I go and with whom...Like all families, sometimes we have our little problems but until now everything is going perfectly. I am happy.

After visiting the house we went to the roof to look at the city. Diana told me that she arrived at that house when she was six years old. Back then, there were no other houses around and they lived in a one-room aluminum house. The story of Diana starts at that time since the oldest memory she has, related to sexuality, occurred in that period...

Diana's first desires for a woman took place when she was 5 years old.

That was in Guerrero when I was staying with my grandmother. I had a friend from as far back I can remember. Your little friend with whom you hang out. I lived two or three years there with my grandmother. That's where I met her, when I was five. You know you start playing without knowing about things... I had not seen pornographic magazines or anything like that. I had not seen any sexual act... The only thing that I saw were kisses and couples. So I started playing with my little friend Myrna. The first time my uncle brought us to the river. He went to cut coconuts over there and we went to the low part of the river, it looked like a little house, so they couldn't see us. We started playing under the water and we held each other innocently...we started kissing. We found it funny, it felt really good. I don't know if she felt the same way but I guess so since we kept doing it. We kept kissing and there the hand game started. How do you learn that, I don't know. I believe it is instinct. You knew what you had to do. You say at that age, what can you feel, however I did feel, I did feel and it was something that I liked. From there I started. Every time I went over on vacation we saw each other and we kept doing it. That was until I was seven. Yeah, since I was young I started feeling those little things.

From her childhood, Diana also remembers playing in front of her house where she used to find rattlesnakes in the grass. Her mother did not permit her to play "boy games". Diana did not care about her mother's opinion, she still played football, baseball and marbles. However, Diana considers that her brother and she received the same education. Besides the differences in games that they were expected to play, they had to participate equally in home chores and had the same permissions. Diana does not feel that her mother educated her to become a wife like other girls in her neighborhood

experienced. She believes that her mother had a different vision from being a single working woman. As she comments:

My mom went to work, she left us home and told us what we had to do but she never said, you have to learn to cook because one day you are going to get married. No, I had to learn to cook because I had to eat, not to give to someone. Many mothers teach their daughters, so their husband will not say "Your mother did not even teach you to iron".

Diana considers that she had a hard time through public elementary school because other children made fun of the dark color of her skin. Throughout that period she did not hide to herself her desire for women but as she affirmed, she did not tell anybody since she felt that it was "something wrong". Unlike other students, Tina did not tease her. Diana remembers how she felt attracted to Tina:

When I was in sixth grade, I liked a girl in my class, her name was Tina, she was a nice girl. She was one of the few who were nice to me. Because she was beautiful, boys were starting to feel those things, those changes like the teacher used to say. When the teacher was not there, they cornered her and they wanted to touch and kiss her. Stupid guys, she screamed and everybody just laughed. I felt full of rage inside because they wanted to hurt someone that I loved. I thought, well if I help her, they are going to say this is not your business. When you are eleven years old, you think, what are they going to say... With all the pain of my heart I didn't do anything.

Since 1974, the SEP, made it mandatory for sex education to be addressed in the sixth grade. The main topic, was the biological changes that occurred during puberty. It was in the course of high school that the topic of sexual relations and contraceptives were

discussed. At home, Diana's mother talked openly about the different changes that would occur to her daughter's body, particularly menstruation.

It is also at that age that her father left home. Diana never talks about her father. During the interview, she only mentioned that he always wanted to control everything and she was disillusioned by him. Up to this day they do not address a word to each other.

Diana met her first love in high school when she was twelve years old. A story that would last for three years:

For three years, she sat in front of me. The first year, we got along really well. How did things start, well, really normally. I started writing to her little notes saying "I really love you, I don't know how you'll take it, I am just like this, I hope you won't stop talking to me". She used to answer to me. I always left the paper on her notebook and I left while she read the paper. She answered "I like you too, how can you believe that I am going to stop talking to you, we are friends". Even on a big piece of paper "I love you, I am not going to leave you" and she drew a heart and two girls inside and it said "You and me, I love you". It was a paper that I kept with so much tenderness. One time I was looking for it and my mom said, "I threw it!" Ay! I think that my mom thought "What is this, why do they write those kind of things to my daughter?" She decided to ignore it...

We were at her house one day, she asked me to visit her... We were in her room, comfortably talking and during one of those close moments we kissed. Since that day, after school I always left her home, I stayed at her house for a short time, it was kisses, caresses, but we never had sex. It did not go through my mind... I believe that I didn't feel the need to do it.

Problems started when we went to 8th grade. There were new girls in the class who thought they were so much, and she started hanging out with them. People called them "Las Maris" because they were all named Maria something. She started to change a lot. She started wearing short skirts and make up, my God! Obviously, guys started to like her and they wanted her. Problems were caused because I was jealous, "You were not like this, you have changed so much." I mean usual discussions that you have. She said, "If you don't like it, it is over." So we stopped talking. Even in a class, the teacher said that we would do team work. She said, "If Diana is in my team, I don't want to be in it." Her pretext was that I never learned anything and that I would disadvantage the team. Obviously because I was mad I said "What do you mean?!" So I went to the museum, I did my drawings, my paper and I learned everything. The day I presented in class, I was the one who talked the most and said everything. At the end I asked if there were any question...and when I passed by her I said "See for yourself!" Since that day, we started again our little notes, "Forgive me, I am sorry" and I said "Don't worry I love you." We started talking again. Mmmh, we were together but not really together, everything went right during the 8th grade. When we went to the 9th grade, we fought again because she got a boyfriend...Two or three of my friends knew about me and they said "Why are you still there, if she does not love you leave her alone, why are you letting yourself suffer." They advised me to leave it there, "She is a buffoon, leave her!"

One day Maria got a migraine and she did not come to school for two or three days. The ones who said they were her friends did not go to see her. One of my friends went to visit her, I told her "Go and visit her to see how she is, since she does not want to see me." The next day, my friend came to school and said " You know what, Maria wants

to see you"...I went to see her, she asked me to forgive her, that she had been foolish, that she loved me and she had not stopped loving me. Her sister was there and she left us alone so she asked me to put my hand on her forehead. When I did, she said she felt better, calmer and protected. After, she asked me to kiss her...It did not go further, after we each continued our lives. We left school and she had boyfriends. I started having another life too. The bad part is that my other life was her sister. I started something with her sister...Oh my God!!!

During that period, Diana's mother asked her why she did not have a boyfriend:

She could not understand why I did not have a boyfriend. She said that if I had one, to take care of myself, to make sure he would not disrespect me, and I always said not to worry. Anyway, because I did not want a boyfriend, but that was in my mind. "Yes mom, yes mom", I accepted all of her advice.

Before, she knew about Diana's sexual preference, her mother's comments on homosexuality were derogatory:

One time when I was approximately fourteen, she told me that a colleague at her work grabbed her nipple... It had been a couple of times that it happened, she did not take it seriously, as a game... Another colleague told my mom, "Be careful, this woman is a lesbian". That same day she came home and told me about it. She said, "At work, there is a lady who grabbed my nipple...and they told me she is a lesbian. Oh I hate them so much!" Oh, my God no, I thought, Diana forget about telling your mother who you are, because what you hate the most is what you have at home. Since that day she started talking about women at her job there who were weird, or that she suspected about one

(being a lesbian), or that she had heard they were (lesbians). It was always in a discriminatory tone...That was her education to me about homosexuality.

After the final break up, Maria was never made aware of her sister's relationship with Diana. This new relationship with Balbina was mostly informal.

I didn't have any intentions with her sister. Her sister knew about me. One day we were watching TV. I was lying down with my arm like this (extended), so she started doing that (caressing her arm). "Ay, ay what is going on?" She said "Do you mind?" I said, "No but it surprises me." So I left my hand like this and she continued. Then she kissed my arm, and I thought oh my God, what do I do now? I asked her "Are you sure?" She looked at me straight in the eyes and said: "Yes." Oh my God, I only remember like Ay! I slept with her. It was the first time that I slept with someone. Everything went well. We kept going like this for two years...One time my neighbors almost caught us because we were in the bathroom. We had some of our clothes off and suddenly "Diana", I had to get out while getting dressed. I told her "Wait, don't leave from here", she was hiding in the bathroom. It was pretty funny...

When I turned 18, she told me she could not continue like this. She told me that it had been a great experience but at the same time she was worried all the time because she felt she was doing something wrong...so it was better to leave it there...She did not feel comfortable to be with a woman... The situation with Balbina changed a lot because she started being around some religious group...Now she says she regrets. I don't feel I know her anymore... she changed so much...We were still friends. We went for walks but I felt like a chaperon. It was Maria with her boyfriend, Balbina with her boyfriend and

me. Like mmh no...I believe it was time for us to separate, for me to separate from both of them.

Contrarily to most women in her neighborhood, Diana continued her studies at the *preparatoria* level. As she explains, most of the other women students married:

With their good or bad luck, I don't know what it was, but when we finished the secundaria(grade 9), they all got pregnant. The beautiful ones, the ones who said they were beautiful got pregnant. I saw them the next year and they all had their children and they did not talk to me. Like they were looking at me with anger, me without any children and beautiful, ha, ha, ha! We have the same age and they look way older than me, they look finished, like old ladies and they have three or four children on their back...I imagine it must be pretty hard "Hey kid shut up!"

Entering the *preparatoria*, Diana met Veronica with whom she had an informal affair for six years. She preferred not to comment on this experience during the interview. When she was 17, Diana started a diploma that would enable her to work as a secretary. During that time she saw several people. She remembers this period:

Ay! How crazy, I was seeing Balbina, Veronica and Luisa... It was not really serious with anybody. I think they were more like curious. Each one came to discover herself, "You know what, I don't like it. Bye." ...Then since I had not finish "preparatoria", I went to adult education, I finished my secretarial studies and I started working. In this preparatoria I met another girl...Then there was this guy that asked me if I wanted to be his girlfriend. He called me sweetie, "bonbonsito, cariñito." I said well let's see how it is since my mom said I have not tasted (what it is to be with a man.) It did not even last for a week. I started to tell him to shave and wear this and that...We did not

even end it, he left without saying goodbye and it made me mad...I kept going on with my life. When I was eighteen I started working in a preparatoria, I dated one of the teachers...Well I mean, before I finished my secretary studies, I did not see that girl anymore, I ended with Balbina and Veronica...

Diana's mother was aware of her daughter's relationship with Balbina. Diana feels that her mother was not informed through the right means. Someone had told her mother once when Diana was away on vacation. When she came back to the city, her mother made strange comments, until one morning she woke her up in order to verify if the rumors were real. As Diana recalls:

I told her yes and she asked me why I had not told her. I said that it was because of the comments she did on her work, that she hated lesbians...She said "But I am your mother." ...It was the first talk we had. We were crying. "It can't be true", she kept negating it. We spent two or three years like this. Every time we talked, we ended up crying, later she cried by herself, I didn't cry. I got tired of it. It was always the same thing, that she would bring me to the psychologist...She could not accept it, "Not my daughter, not my daughter, my daughter has to like men."

It was like this until a year and a half ago or two years ago, since I talked with her... I told her, I want to talk to you, "I want you to get it into your head that I am like this, you can't change me, you won't change me because I don't want to be different. I am like this, I like to be like this, I just want you to understand...if you don't accept me, well to bad...Too bad if you will stop loving me. What can I do? I just want you to accept it, for you to stop wanting to change me." She already wanted me to do a blood test and I don't know what other thing...

Understanding came a few months later:

One day, she started with the theme, she was cleaning and said "I accepted the situation and I understand your friendships." Because she had the idea that any woman who came to visit me was my girlfriend. Truly not, they were my friends. " Like you have male and female friends and my brother too, I do too." ...Because she had this idea, that I slept with everybody. She always said that clubs closed at two or three am. I said "The ones that I go to close at seven or eight am." She said "In my time they used to close at that hour, where do you stay? You stay in a hotel?" ...She thought that I was going to flirt and sleep with people. I said "You don't know me, you don't know your own daughter." She opened the door to me but with those comments she entirely closed it...But that day she opened herself to me. She said she would not say anything anymore that she accepted who I was, that she accepted any person that I would bring home no matter if it was a friend or a lover. The friends of my daughter and son are my friends as she has demonstrated to you. Also she said I could bring anybody. Obviously respecting the house, I won't start making out in front of my brother or outside...So that's why she started doing the other room, if I wanted to be with someone and have intimacy. It was already planned but she mentioned it... So that day she said "You are my daughter, I love you, I accept you, I understand, I won't criticize you and I respect you." ... I was crying on the table.... My mom said "Cry, Cry...the girlfriend you'll bring, will be like another daughter for me." I thought she was so sweet...

Diana informed her brother about her sexual preference on that same day. He was already aware of the situation and he told his sister that he loved her and respected her

life. Most of her friends are aware of her sexual preference, including those at work. She explains the circumstances:

They did not treat me badly. They just gossiped and they were all men. They are worse than women. They seemed like old ladies from a "vencindad"... "Is she? Is she not? She does not wear skirts, she dresses weirdly." But they did not say anything. I simply told them last year...and they stopped gossiping. "She is, that's fine." They did not have anything to comment on anymore... My boss is totally aware. We go to the bank and I tell him "This girl is hot." Then he says "What's the matter Diana I don't pedal two bicycles at the same time." I get along really well with everybody...I gained respect from my family, I gained respect from work and with my friends everything is great.

This respect took several years to be acquired. It was not always easy to stand up in front of others and to be open about her sexual preference. As Diana confessed to me, when she first told her mother and experienced rejection, she thought about suicide. She wondered why she came to this world "if it was to make others and herself suffer." However, she believed that if she acted on her death desire, her mother would suffer even more. Diana told me that she felt that her life started when she entered in *el ambiente*. She was 20, when she first went to a group called *La Casa de Frida*:

The first time I heard about it in the show Desnudo Total of Anabel Ochoa (on the radio)... I heard the address and it was close to work...The first time I went I had my Walkman on. When I saw the half opened door, I heard women voices and laughs, God! I was thinking: Do I enter? Do I not? I ended up not going in. I was really afraid...what scared me was to know who was on the other side. I, I was on the other side! Because I always had lovers who said they were heterosexual, they were not from el ambiente and

they did not even know about it. I was afraid to be the center of attention, I hate that. I said, no I can't go in there. So I went there the next weekend...once again I thought: Do I go in or not?" with my loud walk man. Finally, I said, I have to do it. On the other side there is me. I have to know who I am. I opened the door and as I suspected everybody looked at me, I said "Good afternoon", "Good afternoon, come in." The discussion started...we said our names, our age and why we were there... Everything went well.

I went to a gay party in la Zona Rosa. There were only women. I liked a girl there but she was obviously dancing with her girlfriend to "La cellula que explota." When I hear that song, it reminds me of her. It was when I was at that party that I said, this is my place, and I feel good here. There is nobody looking at you here. No one criticizes you and we are the same. This is why I said this is my world, I pertain to it and I am not leaving it. So I kept going. On one of those occasions I met Sabina. She is my best friend, I never saw her as anything else. The next day, I met her girlfriend, Nina. It was always the three of us...we went together everywhere.

As Diana comments she never had a girlfriend in the *ambiente*:

The same day that I met Sabina, I met her friend Julia. Another with whom I committed an error. It was really an error to sleep with her. We met, we danced and the next day it was as if nothing had happened. I really liked her but it was only an adventure for the night. That time I was really used for the night. But since then, I never had anything in el ambiente. I just recently started to date someone but those four years that I've been in el ambiente, I never have been with anyone.

Despite the fact that she did not meet love in *el ambiente*, she developed profound friendships. I asked Diana, why it had been easier to meet lovers outside *el ambiente*. She

laughed and answered that maybe it was due to the fact that women outside this space were curious to know how it felt to be with a woman. During her early days in *el ambiente*, Diana pursued her relationship with Veronica. She preferred this new space where people were not afraid of public opinions on their sexuality.

She had a complex when we held hands "They are going to see us." But how, don't many girls hold hands on the streets? If she held me, she always hid her face...It was really frustrating because she cared too much about what people would say...I got tired of it. She disappointed me... I started going to clubs, to cafes, to la casa or to Nina's house...When she saw that I did not care about her anymore, she started getting jealous of Sabina. I never had anything with her but she (Veronica) let herself believe it. I let her believe it too, because I did not mind what she thought. She looked for me and said "I fell in love with you. When I lost you I understood. I don't mind anymore what people think."

"Too late!!! You understood it too late, because instead of loving you and feeling what I felt for you, I feel resentment." I didn't believe that I would feel that. I felt rancor and hate for her and I didn't want to see her...That's when I started sleeping more often with her. I didn't have any girlfriend in the ambiente. I don't know if she did not respect herself because I gave her some conditions. I told her "You know what, you want to be with me? Ok, but the day you'll see me or you'll know that I am seeing someone else, I don't want, I don't want you to tell me anything because you don't have any right to tell me anything, because you and me, we are nothing!" I thought she would say no...but she accepted and we continued seeing each other. I think it was wrong because she fell in love even more at the moment I did not want anything with her anymore. So now, I am dating another girl and let's see what happens with her. I don't want to commit any

errors anymore. I want to feel good with myself. I don't want to have any other existential conflicts. They are problems for nothing. I talk with truth now.

Even though Diana has recently started to date a woman from *el ambiente*, she says they spend a large amount of time outside of it:

I say I can have a girlfriend in el ambiente but we won't go to clubs all the time, cafes or any gay spaces. We have been to the theatre, we have walked, we have talked and not only about our preference, about many things to get to know each other. Not everything is el ambiente. I have a life. I have my job.

When I asked Diana what she wanted for the future she told me that she dreamt about a career in graphic design. At the moment it is not possible to continue her studies because she can not afford it. Nevertheless, she is planning to get involved in computer and English courses.

When I asked her if in the future she wanted to live with a partner she answered:

Yes, I would like it but I feel that it could be kind of hard...If one day I do it, I want to be ready for it, psychologically and economically. Living with a partner like this, you can't do the same things as when you don't have anybody. You can't go here or there, do crazy things, get to know another girl and have an experience with her. No, I would have to forget about all of that. Sometimes you miss your freedom...No right now, I am not sure because like I told you... I know that I will end up alone. I am prepared to be alone, for that I am ready. The situation is really accepted in my mind. I don't know how it is to live with someone, but I am prepared to be alone. That I am prepared for.

8.2 Paula

Paula is twenty-six years old. She completed a degree in university. She dedicates most of her time to activism in the field of women and sexual diversity rights. She was born and raised in Mexico City. She lives in an apartment with her parents, her elder brother, her younger sister, an aunt and a cousin. Her father, now retired, had a carpenter business and her mother works as an office assistant. She was raised as a Catholic but she does not practice the religion as the rest of her family fervently does. The story of Paula is constructed from an approximately two hour interview and the numerous hours we spent together.

I met Paula at the beginning of fieldwork, during my first visit to a women's organization. From the beginning, I admired Paula for the enormous number of hours and the efforts that she dedicated to activism wholeheartedly. Following Paula in her regular activities was like an eternal race across the city and back, from morning to night.

One morning I woke up at her house since we had been to a bar in her neighborhood. For my taste, Paula's apartment was one of the most beautiful that I had seen in the city. She always laughed when I told her about the reasons why I liked it so much: High ceilings, large windows, various colors on the walls, the paint peeling in some corners and simple furniture low on hardwood floors. Everything was so simple and pure, a strangely perfect reflection of Paula. That Friday I followed her on her daily activities. We woke up around nine o'clock and ran out without having breakfast. Her aunt asked Paula why she did not offer me breakfast. "We don't have time", she said running down the stairs. That day Paula had five appointments at different ends of the city. We rushed non-stop until 8pm, with an hour lunch break.

Since, through her activities, Paula is a public figure, to protect her anonymity, I have avoided some elements that could make her identifiable. Here is her story...

Paula describes her family as being slightly traditional. She explained to me that her parents would like their children to marry and have children but they don't impose anything on them. They leave them the opportunity to choose. She speaks of her family:

They do family reunions. I did not escape my "quinceañera", like they still have those social traditions. I believe that it is a traditional family but pretty relaxed, like they let us study what we want. If I work somewhere, I just tell them and they don't ask me where I go or anything like that. There is trust and freedom...

Paula remembers that during her childhood, her parents had different expectations of them according to their gender. Paula comments:

It was really clear what boys and girls had to do. They always wanted to fix my hair in a ponytail and they wanted me to wear a dress. I mean, I always protested because I didn't like to wear that. In relation to our freedom, my brother was allowed to play longer and I had to go home earlier.

In Paula's mother's opinion, it was hard to be a woman. She communicated to her daughters that it was difficult in terms of discrimination, in the case of work opportunities for example. She also taught them that men had no reason to be seen as superior but Paula believes that her mother did not live according to the words of her philosophy. Her father also emphasized the difference between genders:

He said to us not to go out of the house and that we should stay home. But he has changed a lot, it was a period...now he permits us to do more things than my mom does.

But before, for him to be a woman it was like "take care because it is more dangerous for a woman to go out..."

Paula remembers feeling her first attraction to a woman when she was six or seven years old. She tells the story:

There was a girl who lived near by... I remember that I loved to play with her, I just saw her and I was enchanted... She said "We are going to play cooking" or something like that. I didn't really like that game but I did it because I wanted to be with her... This girl must have been really important to me because when we moved I remember that I use to write her name on the wall... Also there was this teacher from elementary school. There was always some young teachers that came to do their practices and they were really cute. I remember that I always liked them so much...

Growing up, conversations on sexuality, at home, never went further than pronouncing the words, "Cuidate" (Take care of yourself). In fact, both of her parents rarely addressed the topic. However, Paula remembers her mother speaking about menstruation without entering into too many details. Sexuality was mostly discussed with friends and at school from the sixth grade. Paula remembers the first time they addressed an issue related to sexuality at school:

In school they gave us talks and they took the boys out of the room. They told us what would happen to us at a certain age and they gave us sanitary towels. I felt the gap, and boys also wondered why they took them out of the room. When they came back they looked at us. They made us feel different from separating us and talking like this "This talk is for women, you can't listen to it."

Paula never hid to herself her desires for women but she admits having felt uncomfortable with her sexual preference while she was a teenager. During that period she dated boys.

I did not hear about lesbianism or homosexuality, I used to wonder why did I like girls. I had to be with men. They asked me to be their girlfriend and if the guy was not too bad I said yes. I had a good time but I never felt like wow, even from kissing. I never felt totally in love. I could like them or have a good time but I never felt any strong emotions until I was with a woman.

Her father did not trust her boyfriends:

My dad got mad when I had boyfriends...With one of them, when I was fifteen, he came to my house and dared to ask my mom if he could be my boyfriend. My dad looked at him and acted really serious around him...He did not trust them...he looked at them maybe it was father to daughter jealousy

Her mother accepted the situation if she thought he was a good person for her daughter. She always reminded her "Cuidate". Paula interpreted this advice as to meaning to make sure that boys were faithful to her and to not have sexual relations with them.

After having lived her desire for women in silence and secrecy, Paula confessed to a friend that she was attracted to her, when she was sixteen years old. It was also the first time she affirmed her sexual preference to someone:

We were sitting in a park...I had written her a letter where I said that I liked her. At that point it was really clear in my mind that I liked women. So I gave it to her. She read it while I was looking at her. She thanked me and said that she liked to hang out

with me but she did not feel the same way. At that point I told her that I always felt that I liked women and in this case I liked her. She said that there would be no problem but I noticed that she distanced herself...

Paula continued living her desire in secrecy. It was at eighteen years old that she had her first girlfriend. She explains how she met her in a religious group for youth:

Ha, ha! Supposedly really religious but they did parties every week. Ha, ha, ha! One time they did the party at my house and that girl came. I saw her, she looked really young, she was sixteen but I liked her. At one point I started talking with her and we clicked. We said that we would go and play basketball and we kept going frequently, I liked it. We started to have such a good time and I told her " I have something to tell you...I like women, and I like you. I am in love with you." She did not expect it. She told me that it was wrong, that it was not possible...but that she would help me to change. Her friendship would be for that, to help me change. We kept in touch but I liked her so much that I had to tell her " You know what I think I have to stop seeing you because I understand that you can't accept me but for me it is going to be difficult to see you and feel this."

So one day I told her "Why don't I kiss you and that's it. You see if you like it." She got curious so she accepted. After, I asked her what she thought of it and she said she liked the kiss and from there we started going out.

When I asked Paula when she had her first sexual relations, she answered that it was with her first girlfriend. However, she labeled that sexual intimacy more as an erotic moment:

We did not really have what we call sexual relations, it was pure eroticism. We did not have to take off our clothes to feel. It felt really good, it was like starting to discover, where do I like it, where I could feel that electricity. It was something great even though there was not exactly what we call a sexual relation but there was all this eroticism.

Her relationship with Sheherazade, did not end because of a lack of love. As she explains, exterior circumstances separated them:

They discovered us at her house. I used to talk to her brother and he always suspected it. Her mother put a lot of pressure on her. I thought that she would not notice but she put so much pressure on her that she had to tell her. Her brother told me that her mother knew. I took my pride and I went to her house. Her mom told me that none of us was guilty... but that if I did not want anybody to know about it at my house, I had to distance myself from her. Back then I did not dare to talk about it or I did not have enough trust for this to be known....so I agreed. Also, she did not do anything. She was there and when her mom was talking to me she did not say "I love her" or "I still want to be with her" or "I am not going to stop seeing her." She was silent so I did not have any choice but to accept. The bad part is that she lived close to my house and I always saw her. It was a hard moment for me, to distance myself from someone I loved so much and to not have anybody to talk to about it...

Paula felt depressed when this relationship ended. Other areas of her life were also redefined after this break up. She explains how her vision of Catholicism was transformed by the consequences of this event:

When my relationship ended, there was this preacher who saw me in the church and he asked me "What are you doing here ?" He knew that it was over with this girl because her mom had told him. He was kind of saying what are you doing here, are you coming to pick up girls or do you have a problem ? I felt bad because I did not expect this kind of rejection. I told him that I was waiting for someone and from there on, I thought that it was wrong to treat people like this. I still believe but I don't go to church anymore...

However, her relation to Catholicism did not only change through this event. Paula disagreed with the discourse that the Catholic Church had on homosexuality:

Look they baptized me, I did my first communion and I went to church every Sunday...I was convinced that the Catholic religion for me was like wow. I heard about other religions and I was convinced by that one, maybe because it was the one that they inculcated me in. But when I started hearing how they talked about homosexuality, I thought how is this possible? It was an internal conflict because I said how is it possible that they talk like this? I don't think there is anything wrong (with homosexuality). Then I thought that if I was a sinner, I'll still believe but I won't go anymore... I mean I still consider myself Catholic but I justify it saying that there is nothing wrong, but they'll have to value it one day...

When Paula started university she met a man who became her best friend and with whom she discussed this difficult period. After having developed a friendship, Alejandro became her boyfriend.

I was really depressed and I think he was my best friend. I told him what happened to me. He was really in love with me and he told me "Why don't you try it with me?" I was with him, but not because I said that I would change. Instead, at that moment he was a good support to me. I knew that I liked women. We really clicked and he helped me so much but we ended our relationship because it was not worth it for him to fall more in love with me.

Throughout that difficult period, Paula found rejection but support as well from people such as Alejandro and Ruth, her brother's girlfriend.

One girl that was my brother's girlfriend knew about it, or let's say that they told her. After I ended with my first girlfriend...I was in a situation that was really heavy because they started telling people with whom I hung out that I was like that. They told the mother of my brother's girlfriend. She(Ruth) came to see me and asked me "Is this true?" , I told her "Yes, why?" She said "It's because they went to my house and they told my mom, to not let me hang out with you anymore." [I said] "Ay! What did your mom say?" "She said if I want at some point to do anything (with a woman) I am free to do what I want and my mom appreciates you, she knows you and she knows your family so there is no problem." I thought Wow! When I went to her house, her mother never talked about it, she just treated me really well.

Paula continued her studies and progressively left that depressing period. A year after, she came in contact with *el ambiente* . It was a coincidence since she went to a museum and saw a poster that advertised a gay and lesbian conference and the annual gay pride parade.

I could not let the occasion pass...the information was right there and I had always been looking for it... That was in 1994. It also said that there would be the gay pride parade that takes place every year. So I went to this parade. For me it was a great experience. I was alone and I heard that there would be a party after the parade. Back then, I still did not have any information. I only saw in some magazines that there were contacts to know lesbians...When I went to the parade, I went by myself but I met a friend with whom I went to "preparatoria" and I already knew he was homosexual, but he had not imagined this about me. He asked me "What are you doing here? ...Are you "de ambiente? " I did not know what that word meant but I answered "I was with a woman", so he answered "Oh, so you are." So we walked together and I knew about the party so I went.

At the party Paula heard about an organization called *Mujeres Unidas*, that she started frequenting regularly. She affirms that this was the element that gave her more security about her sexual preference. She explains the events that cemented her assurance towards her sexuality and led her to participate in activism:

My first girlfriend was really important because I said I feel really well and more than dreaming about it or desiring, I was living it. But I think that the first parade was something important as was the fact that I had started going to a space where I could inform myself. Once I had found that space and the parade I thought there has got to be something more, and I want to do things and I want to inform myself. If it was hard for me to discover all this, well I would like it to be easier for other people.

This new self-confidence also changed the language that she used to describe her sexual preference:

At the beginning I said: "I like women." I did not say "I am a lesbian." I did not like that word. When I used to tell my friends, I said "I am in love with a woman" or "I like this woman" but I did not say I am a lesbian. When I started going to the group, I started using the word. It was hard to say it, but that was the first word that I used.

Paula volunteered at *Mujeres Unidas* because she believed in the possibility of social change. In that organization she got involved in several projects. She also helped forming a new organization for lesbians under 30 years of age. It is also in that space that she formed new friendships and met her next girlfriends. Those relationships lasted for five months and three months. Paula did not like to have adventures with women. Her perception of sex was intertwined with love:

I related sexual relations with love. I would need to be in love to do something with someone. One time I did something crazy. I was drunk and I ended up with a girl whom I had just met. I felt so bad the next day. I was not with anybody at that moment but I said that it is not possible that it can be like that. You don't really enjoy it, I mean I did not really enjoy it... But I have always related it to affection. To enjoy it I have to be attached to the person emotionally.

The strongest emotional attachment that Paula lived was developed throughout the longest relationship that she had. Paula spent four years with Sara, the person she calls the love of her life.

I fell in love like I never had before. Maybe because of the time we spent together, it was four years. I think we shared so much and we learned to know each other and I think that made me feel a strong love, like I never had.

Paula describes how they met:

I arrived to Mujeres Unidas...it was her first time there...I showed her the space and we started talking... I was talking and looking at her and saying Wow! She made an impact on me, she seemed so sweet...I really liked her so I invited her to come to a discussion group, but she told me that she could not come this Sunday, maybe on the next one. She left and I felt a strong emotion. I thought, I should have given her my phone number, something that I never do. She really touched me. She went to the meeting that I had told her about. I thought she would never come because she had told me that she could not come on that day. I was happy that she came. I was looking for an opportunity to talk with her and it was obvious that there was a certain interest on her side too. Two weeks later the group organized a picnic. We were drinking and there was nothing else to drink anymore so the two of us offered ourselves to go and buy some more beer. On our way we were talking and talking. It was great because suddenly she asked "Do you have a girlfriend?" and I said "NO!" I wondered, why she asked me this. That day we ended up kissing, like we drank so much. I mean at that time, I did not want to be with anybody, I've had many disillusiones and I also thought that if she was starting in el ambiente, it was kind of too early. She had to be aware of all the women that there were because I already had gone through this. I know that the ambiente blinds women sometimes... So that day we went for coffee and she told me that she wanted something serious and I told her "Think about it well. Don't hurry yourself. You will meet many people" I was still saying no. After that coffee we kissed each other. It was incredible. After we called each other, we went to a movie and that's when we talked again about it and again I said "Think about it, I don't want you to have any doubts about it, you can meet more

people." But she told me she wanted something serious and that's when we started, from that day.

I asked Paula to describe how this relation had been in those four years. This is her answer:

We got to know each other so much, emotionally and sexually. I believe she is the one with whom I have shared the most... I believe that it was a really close relationship. We always did things together. It is also the relationship where I have felt the most jealousy. There was a lot of communication. It was a really strong relationship but really conflictive too because I faced situations that I would never have permitted but they happened. Maybe I did not like the way she was sometimes and that made conflicts emerge. I think I found someone really different from me but we shared so much love...

Her mother knows about us. She was so kind with me. I think that I had a marvelous mother-in-law too...There was no major problem, I stayed at her house. Her mom always knocked on the door and brought us a juice or breakfast. She never intruded in our relationship. Once she saw us arguing and she said not to let this happen but with so much respect. Some of her ants knew about it. She brought me to her family reunions and they treated me well too. One of her cousins is gay and it was great to go out with him too. Her dad also, she sees sometimes and he never said anything wrong about it....

She helped me so much because she did not mind us kissing on the street. I did it with my other girlfriends but I never had met anyone with so much trust in herself...We talked about it, about what people could say to us on the streets but there was no aggression during those years because we looked so sure of ourselves...

At the beginning we went (to gay and lesbian spaces) so she could know places...but after we preferred to be by ourselves...We preferred to stay at her house. There was a period where we stopped going out. I spent all my time at her house...She went out with her friends to parties and I did too but we did not go to clubs anymore...

I used to put so much time into activism and I progressively gave more space to my partner. I left many things. I stopped participating in many events to spend time with her but I believe that it was worth it. I stopped seeing my friends. I did not go out anymore. I had a good time. Now that it is over, I am recuperating some of the things I left but I did not mind leaving them.

I did (have plans for the future), but she did not yet. I mean, she said that she was too young to take those kind of decisions. At the beginning she wanted (us to live together) but now she thinks that she still has so much to live, with this I tell you everything (about our break up)... She is 23 years old... So she says no, maybe in the future. And she says that if she did it (live with someone), it would be me.

When I met Paula she was still recuperating from this difficult end. Deep in her heart she hoped that they would eventually be back together again. They occasionally continue seeing each other as friends.

Paula never discussed her sexual preference with her parents. She believes that they are aware of it but she prefers to wait until they are ready to discuss the issue with her. However her brother and her sister are conscious of it and have accepted the situation really well. As Paula explains, at the beginning she had to confront them on their judgements:

My sister asked me because she saw a magazine where I participated. She saw my picture in a lesbian magazine. She asked me:

- *Why do you hang out with lesbians ?*
- *Why?*
- *I saw your picture*
- *...I collaborate in that magazine*
- *Tell me if you are or not ?*

I had heard really homophobic comments from her when she said:

- *I dreamt that you kissed a woman*
- *What did you do ?*
- *I kicked you out of the house.*

So I decided to tell her at that moment that my friends were and that it would not change anything because they were good people and I was too. She asked me so many things. She had so many doubts. She asked me if it was because of something, if I wanted to be a man, that if I liked women, why didn't I dress in a more feminine way...She said she never suspected it but that if it was what I wanted it was ok. She said not to tell my parents for now.

...My brother, one time when we were talking he told me "You should stop hanging out with so many lesbians"...He saw two of my friends who came to my house and kissed right in front of the door...I told him that he could not generalize...and he could not say who was or wasn't. I even mentioned one of his ex's and he said " She is too!?!", so I told him that I was. He said "I knew." He knew about the situation when I had my first girlfriend and he said that he had tried to minimize problems for me. He had

always been there taking care of that situation, that in the end I was his sister...and that it was not a good idea to tell my parents.

Paula admitted that her attraction to women did not distance her from her friends. Independently from their sexual preference, most women in her surroundings had boyfriends and/or girlfriends and were not planning to get married soon. All of her cousins with the exception of one, were married but she said that her family did not accord any importance to the fact that her situation was different. Paula commented that perceptions on when women should marry have changed: "When my mother told me that my younger cousin was getting married I said "How insane, they do not know what to do with their life." At the end of the interview, I asked Paula what she dreamt for the future. This is her answer:

I would like to be independent, have my own business. I don't think that right now I am thinking in terms of life in a couple but when it will happen I want us to share, share our work and live together. Maybe I will take some distance from activism but I would always like to collaborate.

I also asked if she would like to have children in the future:

I would not like to have children. I don't feel this necessary...I like children, if my partner would want to have them I would accept. But for me to have it, spend nine months like this, no...I don't know maybe I'll change my mind with time but it is an enormous responsibility. So it would be to leave so many things to get others, the affection and the emotion to have somebody. I am not worried what people would say or the education that we could give. On that side, I think that we could solve it together but I think it would be leaving so many things.

8.3 Andrea

Andrea is 23 years old. She has lived all of her life in Mexico City with her younger sister, her mother and her father, who hold professional positions. Andrea has a degree in communications and presently works in her field. She does not practice a particular religion while her family consider themselves to be Catholics. This testimony is constructed on the base's of two interviews that took place five months apart; and from field notes recorded in the course of participant observation.

I had seen Andrea several times at *Mujeres Unidas* but we hadn't spoken a word to each other until I asked her if I could interview her. After the first interview that took place in late November, we talked for a long time. Walking down the streets of *Coyoacan*, she asked me to answer the same questions I had made to her a couple of hours before. Andrea and I spent many hours talking about our lives and visiting our favorite parts of the city: *Coyoacan* and the *Centro Historico*. We went to several art museums and discussed her favorite topic: Visual arts. We also spent some time in coffee shops writing and drawing in our respective note books. We were so similar that we would walk down the streets knowing where we were going without saying a word about our destination. We found we had so many points in common. At the beginning, the surprise of our many similarities produced a mutual attraction, but soon enough we came to the conclusion that we would be better friends than lovers. At the inauguration of an art exhibit I met Andrea's sister, cousin and aunt but I never had the chance to meet the rest of her family.

Andrea described her nuclear family as “contemporary and slightly traditional at the same time.” She labels them as contemporary because they accepted her sexual preference. For example, her father asks her questions about her most recent girlfriend. She also believes them to be traditional as in the case where Andrea and her sister were thought to serve their dad. She also describes her mother behaving traditionally:

She is traditional because of marriage. She still has the hope that I will get married or that I'll have children. It is always about the fact of how human beings goes. If you are a woman, if you are a man. If you are a man, you have to work, get married, sustain your wife and have children. If you are a woman take care of your husband, feed him and blah blah ...

On the other hand, Andrea's mother shared an empowering view on gender with her daughters. In effect, for being female she had to escape from home to be able to go to school. In turn, she thought her daughters had to study hard to be independent women.

When I asked Andrea what her father told her about what it meant to be a woman, she answered that he did not teach her to be a woman:

We almost did not talk about the theme and he did not teach me that much how to be a woman but rather, how to be a man...Because we played boy games, he treated me like a boy but while being a girl... it was really fun because I thought why does he treat me like this or why is he like this? If I am a girl why do we play violent games? ...or baseball?... He told me I'll teach you to catch the ball. I did not ask “Dad let's play baseball.” I did not even know what that was. He taught me and I learned to like it. My mother also encouraged it because she said “Andrea should get into a softball team.” It was... kind of seen as a hard sport for women then. This is not perceived as wrong

now...I think he tried to do the same with my sister, to not leave her apart but it did not work because my sister was too girly.

While her family approved behaviors that were not always perceived as socially feminine, teachers and some students at school did not necessarily have the same opinion:

In elementary school... I played football, wrestling or other boy games with them (boys). That was not seen as right...by the teachers and principally by other female students but not by my mom. My mother always said "Ay, she can do what she wants". Up to this day, this is what she says...Then also in elementary school... at play time I played marbles... I played with a friend... it was like a show "Come, come, we are going to see two girls play marbles."

Andrea also described her extended family to be really united and loving to each other. The entire family sees each other every Saturday. With the exception of her grandmother, Andrea described them to be "open minded" in relation to gender and sexuality ideas.

Andrea does not remember her first attraction towards females until she was approximately 13 years old when she started high school:

It was something crazy because I got closer to her. I started talking to her because I wanted to be close to this person. We started talking. We got along really well. She realized that I was special too...It was funny because this same day we started holding hands. We started having some kind of contact that I never realized it was possible to have, that as a woman I could be holding the hand of another woman So it was something really strange because I liked it and every time I wanted more. She did not know. I knew about myself but she did not know anything about herself or about me or anybody. So she

was like my friend and told me "Come and sit on my ties." She held my hands and caressed me. I always wanted more and more and more but there was nothing. We never kissed or anything like that, but it was more like we played with our hands and we had body contact. It was kind of strange because with a friend you usually have a certain distance...but not with her. With her it was as if we really were together but not passing the limit of a kiss or sexual touch...I believe that she had also a conflict because she went out with a lot of boys but she always said to me "You are really nice and they are like nothing." So I thought what is going on, are we going to go out together ? But nothing happened... I was afraid of how she would react [if I asked her] ...

As Andrea explains, her sexual preference made her question her gender:

I thought that something was wrong because well... what everybody thinks, that I was a boy trapped in a female's body. I thought what's up with my life? What am I going to do because if I like girls I must be a boy but I have a girl's body so what am I going to do ? So I entered in conflict about what are you, where are you going, what will you do?... It was a gender conflict...I did not even know what a sexual preference was... It was a problem because I said it always has been man and woman, man and woman. How will it be woman-woman or man-man ? ...So I started studying, reading, thinking ...Then I said I don't care what books say because they said something and I thought it could not be like that... They were old books, wrong books that said that it was an aberration, a sickness. Everything that you can imagine that we already know... I thought that it could not be like this...not like the books said...So I let it sleep and I said "I don't care what people think" ... So I let time pass... I wanted to forget it, leave it in a little box and continue with what I felt... follow my heart... Later I thought I am a woman and I have a

woman's body and it remained clear to me...Because I liked more my body than a man's body that was what I liked. In a certain way to think about having my body in contact with a woman's body was something really, really special that I thought like wow! Not as a man, but as a woman with a woman...

It was at 18 years old, Andrea labeled herself as a lesbian for the first time:

I accepted and did not accept myself. I really accepted myself when a guy from preparatoria that really liked me and was dying for me, said "Why don't you want to go out with me? I have a car, money, I am good looking. Why?" I was looking at the ground and looking at all the teenagers running in the courtyard. He said "It is because you are a lesbian, right." I said "What? This is the word?" like I saw a super light and said wow!, So I researched and asked and I saw that it was people together of the same sex. I thought, wow, because I did not know the word I just knew about homosexual and gay but I never had heard lesbian. So when he told me this I turned to look at him and told him "I think so!" So he started crying...he left running and he did not want to talk to me. [After] he said "Well, don't worry I will help you...." So he was a great support. He also told me "Let's go I'll show you how to hook up with girls"... [He said] you've got to look them in the eyes and leave them no choice but to kiss you. And I said "No, they don't like that, you have to be calm, sweet and romantic, flowers, chocolate." And he said, "No that doesn't work." So we did a test. One day we went to the Zona Rosa to flirt. The one that would get more girls was going to win. I did it really subtle, really cool and everything and I think I won but he never accepted it. How could a woman get more women than a man ... [We went] to any bar where you had of everything. So I started knowing people and places because it was something else than what I had, I started

knowing of the existence of gay bars and clubs. So... the world was opening when I thought I was alone...

Andrea never went to any of those gay and lesbian bars that she knew about. Her real entrance to the *ambiente* took place when she went to queer pride in 1995.

I started researching and I realized that (the cultural magazine) Tiempo Libre announced gay pride and I went. I was there by myself and I met two really nice women and I walked with them. I said wow! This is mine, this is what I want. I saw many men and women and of everything and then I said I am not alone...I thought we would be like five people at the parade but we were so many...This is where I got a flyer of Mujeres Unidas and I went. And this is where the rest of the story starts...

Andrea went to *Mujeres Unidas* a month later since she wanted to meet other women in her situation. It is in this space that Andrea met her first *pareja*, when she was 18 years old. She remembers when she first saw Rachel:

They were cutting her hair because before there were a lot of services there. So they were cutting her hair and it was like love at the first sight. We started talking "I like this and I like that." She invited me to go out and I accepted. There had to be something strong for me to accept.

For Andrea it was her first relationship since she never experienced it before with a male or a female. As she says, it was a serious relationship that lasted for almost two years:

It was something serious. I always want to think about things seriously. I don't like to play with people's feelings. No, it is always for real and it was serious and it

started really well...because everything was new and really romantic. I was discovering, discovering and discovering...

While Andrea liked the new events she was experiencing with her girlfriend, she did not like the *ambiente* she was also exploring for the first time:

We mostly went to parties that Mujeres Unidas organized, then we started going to clubs, to Nya. Nya is the place that you have to know first...I am a very calm person and I don't like to go out to clubs and stuff like this that much. Sometimes, yes because it is necessary but I could not tell you that I like to go there every weekend...I didn't like it. I thought that to be gay or lesbian would be different, it would be calmer, it would be more! I don't know I never thought that they would smoke so much, drink so much and party so much. There are always more places like this, why aren't there any cultural places like reading rooms, sports? ...It is always beer, cigarettes dance and flirting. I thought that it was different but it isn't.

Even though some of her friends were informed of her sexual preference, this first relationship forced her to confront her other friends:

They knew but not really at 100%. They saw me hugging her and holding her hand so when I told them they said "We already knew but we just wanted you to tell us. It is ok". I thought "Ay thank you" (sarcastically). I had thought so much on when to tell them and how to tell them because I thought they would not react well to it. But they reacted really well and up to this day they call me and say "Hi Andrea, how is your girlfriend?"

Andrea's family often invited Rachel to family gatherings. Andrea believes that even though she never told her parents of her relation with Rachel, they knew perfectly well she was her girlfriend:

We never discussed it. Like, both of them (parents) are really intelligent and they realized that I was only getting calls from girls and not from guys. If I man called "Oh, a man called you" or "Tom called you. Are you going to go out with him? Is he your boyfriend?" [I said] "No, he is not my boyfriend". Like there were always more women and I spent hours and hours talking with more women than men.

While her parents were not fully aware of the situation with Rachel, Andrea told her sister since she needed an ally at home to discuss the situation and cover for her when she went out:

...When I started going out with Rachel, I was really going from home and school, from school to home, from home to school and there was nowhere else. So one day I got home at eleven thirty at night. Me, Andrea at such an hour, they were going to make a scandal at my house. When I got there, my sister said "Guey, where were you?" I told her "You know what, don't bother me because I was with Rachel in Coyoacan, and, you know what, Rachel is my girlfriend!" I exploded like this and I told her and she remained silent. It was strange because she told me "Oh, so you were with Emma." [I said], "No, no I was not with Emma, she was my friend..." [She said] "And Barbara?", [I answered] "No, she is not my girlfriend. No, no Rachel is my girlfriend and that's why I came late and that's it!" That night we almost did not sleep and she was asking me "And how do you do this and that..." It was also that I had to have supports. In the case

of my sister I told her "You know what, I am going to get home late because I am going to be with Rachel so you have to say that I went to this place." ...

By contrast, Rachel's family was perfectly aware of her relationship with Andrea. They welcomed her as another member of the family:

At the beginning we were afraid because her sister told us... "You know what, mom already knows that you are like this and that you are with Andrea." We worried a lot but everything went really well after... [She knew because] I gave her a gift, I like details like that and on the back I wrote "I love you, Andrea." So her mom went to her room to get a pillow and she saw the gift so she said that's it! But she had a gay uncle that died of AIDS, so the family was already kind of informed on what it was to be gay. So she saw this and did not say anything. Then I went to her house and we were cuddling while watching TV. We heard the key and we separated quickly and she only said "Good afternoon." She already knew back then... But I've realized lately that I am different because I went to her house and we ate and I washed the dishes and I helped vacuuming and things like that and her mother saw it. So her mother liked me and talked to me really well. There was no discrimination. After that Rachel talked to her and told her that I was her girlfriend. She said "Good because she is a really nice person." ... She got to know the truth and she saw that I was nice. One time she said "Ay Andrea, the truth is that with my daughter you are like bread from God but Rachel is a devil. So... I want to tell you that with my daughter you are going to suffer a lot. " And I stayed like that (mute) and then said "No, I don't think so". But the truth is that she was right... And [another time] she [told] me "I would have liked to have a daughter like you Andrea, not like Rachel." And Rachel like this "Mom, why do you say this?" She said "Because Andrea

is marvelous". So the comparison got to a point where she said " It is because you are my daughter too. So both of you are my daughters." And she held us really tight.

Sometimes, when she called me she said "How are you, daughter?" Whenever I talked with Rachel or her sister I told her "Say hi to mom." That was great because the mother loved me very much because of how I behaved with them. But when they compare you with your girlfriend and you are part of the family, Oops!!

The beginning of her relationship with Rachel also corresponded to the start of her active sexual life.

At the beginning with Rachel I was discovering everything...I did not know anything or how. And wow, I liked it. But now that I think about it I believe it wasn't that great. We experimented so much because it was something new. She also had never done it with anybody before. So it was like "We are going to do this and that..." And she was always a fan of Chantilly cream. So it was always like "And now with Chantilly." And I said "No!", "Yeah ,it tastes good!" So imagine how I ended, all sticky. [She said] "and now we are going to do it with flavored lubricant" ...So I was like her guinea pig and she did her tests on me. I never did any experiments on her. I had to endure all of that. Ha! Ha! At the beginning...When we started she always initiated everything. Like at the end the roles were exchanged.

After the initial months Andrea and Rachel started having problems. Andrea recognizes that Rachel's mother was right by saying she would suffer much with her daughter:

[At the beginning] I was her pareja, there were no lovers or any crazy things like that, which there were...when it started going wrong... She was really undecided and she

didn't know what she wanted. I was really sure of myself and I was really in love with her. The truth is... she was the one who had the glass of water...and she drank water whenever she wanted. At one point when I distanced myself I left her like in the desert. But I went back to her because I loved her and she was my first love and she was really important... she came back to do the same. The problem of infidelity was always present between Andrea and Rachel... She wasn't really smart about it (lovers) because she left many things for me to see and she received strange calls. [I thought] "Well, she is cheating on me. It is more than obvious." I thought ok and at the beginning I accepted it because I loved her, but I wanted her for me, so after I said "That's not good and I think that I am hurting myself" So I walked away ...

Also in my case I was always really dedicated to my school and work. And [she always said] "Let's go party this Wednesday, for example" and me "But it's Wednesday, tomorrow I have to go to school!" [She said] "No, no, you always have a pretext to not go out with me, or not to stay at my house or whatever" And [I said] "I have to study" or "My parents don't let me go out." ...This too affected the relationship. It was because of that, that she looked for other people to be able to go out with, to party with and feel good. But she did not want to leave me so that was kind of bad. And Andrea was for when she wanted to be serious and calm, and when she wanted to go out and party it was X or Y, her lovers.

[After] I met another girl...Alicia...it was strange because we started off really well but after Rachel called me, I started going out with both of them and I thought "orale" (here we go!), now I am like Rachel. I don't want to be like this. So I broke up with Alicia to go back with Rachel. Big mistake! When Rachel saw that I was sure about

myself she left me again. So I said no. This is a big mistake. And another girl appeared and everything was going right and again, big mistake, Rachel!

During that period where she intended to end her relationship with Rachel, Andrea also made new friends at Mujeres Unidas:

My next step was a period of relaxing and studying because I dedicated myself to school. I also went to Mujeres Unidas ...it was the step of knowing women there, as friends. Because it is not necessarily like a lot of people think that if you are in those groups it is because everybody is with everybody, not at all. It is a group where they also support you, where you have friends and where you can help too... You learn how to defend yourself, how to learn to say the things you feel and have confidence in yourself. Because many women that go there go to discover themselves, to learn how to defend themselves because of X or Y... Many women are shy, they get closer to you and they say "Hey, hey, how can I do this?" And I like to help people so I help... It can be personal support. It can be support doing activism...

After multiple intentions of ending her relationship with Rachel, Andrea finally distanced herself. The complete end of the relationship took place when she met Mariana whom with she was for almost two years:

Mariana was really different in all aspects... because she was stable, mature and she knew what she wanted. Something more similar to me and that the other women did not have. [I will tell you] a story about when it was going well... We went to the museum and it was like wow! Because she knew so much and I knew a lot too, so it was discussing about the theme. "No, no, I know more than you" But it was always as a

game, not in a bad way. "Ha, Ha, Ha" we laughed and we kissed in the middle of the exhibit room and we did not care if people saw us...

Mariana's mother did not accept her daughter's sexual preference. Consequently Andrea almost did not interact with her girlfriend's family. She explains:

Her family was her mother and her two brothers. In the case of her mother at the beginning she said "Oh, Andrea is a nice person" But when she started realizing that I brought gifts to Mariana and saw that they had my signature or something like this. She said "Oh! Oh!" She finally realised what was going on because of some pictures she found, so she started changing with me and Mariana. Her brothers really did not care.

Mariana was Andrea's second sexual partner, since as she explains, she needs to feel in love with a person to have a sexual relation with them. But her sexual experience with Mariana turned out to be much different from the one she had with Rachel:

...In the case of Rachel we had a place to do it, her house, but not in the case of Mariana. So with Mariana at the most we did it 12 times and with Rachel 500 000 times. So I think that the place where you can do it influences a lot. I always said "Let's go to a hotel". [She answered] "No because I'll feel embarrassed, or no because I don't want, or no because whatever..." It was like really stupid, like really planned. When we went out on trips, we knew that at night time for sure...And like no...because she felt free, her mother wasn't there, we were out of the city, no one knew us, in a hotel X, we were with her friends. There were many factors other than desire, love or feeling calentura. Instead it was everything else.

Unlike the relationship with Rachel, in this relationship, Andrea was the one that always initiated sex. Andrea was always the one sexually stimulating her partner :

It was because[she said] "I like you to do this and I like you to do it." But also it was a little bit like she wanted. If she felt good like this, well, for me, it was good...[Once she did it on me] but we realized that it did not work like this... I did it like this because she wanted it. It was important for me to know that she felt good in this... And since it worked we did it like this...It was really hard for her to come but she came. It was very important for me, that she came. Even though I didn't have an orgasm...It was really important that she came. [But] it was really hard... It was hours and hours [I said] "No, no more please, I am tired." It was the voice of the angel saying "Yes Andrea you can do it." and the voice of the devil saying "No, no that's enough!" ...It was important because I thought that if she did not come it was not worth it, or I did not do it well... In the case of Mariana I had to stimulate her like half an hour so she could have an orgasm...I came too with the few things I could see, with what I heard, I smelled, what I felt on my mouth...It was sensorial stimulation, of the five senses and curiously [I had complete orgasms]. But yeah I think I enjoyed it more with Mariana than with Rachel. It is bad to compare, isn't it? It is like really hard for me to compare. Like with Mariana I was really in love, really giving myself so I enjoyed it more. With Rachel there were so many things going on.

After the initial year, Andrea and Mariana started having problems in their relationship:

So for a year and five months it was good. After she started realizing that I was not very interested in clubs, or in hanging out with many friends, and I had problems

(with my parents) to go out of my house and I was really dedicated to my work...If it had been school, now it was work, that I cared about...So everything fell too because of [her] friends and because I did not tell her that much about my feelings. I just swallowed them. To give you an example, she told me that we would see each other for lunch and in the middle of the meal she would say "We are going to see Carolina in an hour" And I thought that the whole day was for me. No, it was half me, half her friends, so it bothered me. So (one day) we got to a point where the "bag" where we were throwing all of our problems broke and everything changed (from a day to the next)... Also she had already other interests ... she wanted to study abroad and she wanted to spend more time by herself...I wanted to live with her... but as I've told you everything fell down from one day to the next. I thought she wanted to (live with me)... Well, like I am waiting for the ideal woman to come. I thought she was the ideal woman but no. Once again, I am waiting for destiny to bring me someone who will really appreciate me...and who will love me and will want to spend all of her time with me. It has to be different, something has to happen for the situation to change, for the situation to take place.

Andrea mentioned that one of the recurrent problems she had with her partners was the place her work and her family took in her life. As she explains the most important is her family, then work and at last comes her partner:

It can depend on the situation, the day or how I feel but generally it goes in that order. First it is my family because of everything they have given to me, because they are my principal support. Then comes work because I generate an income for my family and my partner. My partner comes last because it is something important, but, like things can be hard. I could give 100% of my time to my partner and I could come out with

something stupid like what happened with Rachel and say "Oh God, I've lost so much time that I could have spent with my family and working. So [partners] are last because of what can happen...But if something becomes more formal...if I live with her and there is a similar relationship to what you have in a marriage...[then it will be] first my partner, then work and then my family.

While in the first interview Andrea affirmed she had never opened the dialogue about her relationships with her parents, at the second interview she said that the dialogue had been opened more explicitly recently:

A couple of days ago she told me "Why are you like this?" or "Why are people like this? Like she talks often in a plural form... [I say] "No mom because you have to open a new light, a new field for us. This is not the past anymore..." And she says "But you can't silence this?" I say "No, we can't silence it." Every time there is a news report (about queers on TV)... I always turn it up to maximum so they can hear it. I explain to them "It's because this is not like this but like this, this is a man and you say this like this or like that." How you have to use the correct words. In a certain way how to educate this group so after this group can educate this other group and then that one, another one. And I have done it with my aunts, they say "Look it is a maricon." And I say, "It is not maricon, it is a gay, it is a homosexual" I tell them "How different does it sound, doesn't it?" ...So every time that they are about to say a derogatory comment, they look at me first. . They say "He was homosexual", they underline it in red...And with my parents too, more with my dad, he says "And why do you say transsexual and transgender, and why is it like this" Three days ago he told me "Ok it is your girlfriend and are you the man or the woman?" I tell him "It is not like this dad. It is not a role, it

is feeling, I think I feel good with a woman and not with a man.” He said “And what are you?” “I am a woman and she is a woman and that’s it!” He didn’t asked me anything else. Like he said “Oh, I think that you are right.” Something else is that my mother always defends homosexuals. But it is really different for her to defend homosexuals than having at home a lesbian daughter... But she always says “Any way, I will always love you” And she is like open and I tell her about what we do. With my father, not yet, because there is not this grade of trust yet...But the other day I brought a bill that he used for his fiscal deduction and he told me “You went to eat pizza with Gina” And I said “Yes, of course” So like we are starting to get into this field...I think that if I was a guy it would be worse in my family. Because my grandfather defended so much our last name he wanted it so much to survive. My grandfather always wanted a nephew and never got it, we are only women. Imagine if I was a man and I come up with this. They would cut down my head! It would be worse.

When I asked Andrea what she dreams for the future, she answered:

This is one of the big questions and because of this trust or this path that I already have marked down they (women) get afraid. It is me saying you know what I have this line and I am going to do this and I do it. And they get afraid and they say “How did she do it, it was so hard.” Like I said to my first partner “My objective is to work in a museum one day. ” “Ha, Ha, Ha”, she laughed. But you see now I am in a museum. I feel they get afraid because I am so sure of myself and I know where I am going, when I get it they get really afraid. But what do I want? Well many things. I would like to have my own cafe... I want to be really recognized for my art. Like I always said I want to be the

best one in something. Only the best and for people to see me walking down the street and say "Oh, here she goes"...

Andrea also mentioned that she would like to live with a partner in the future and have children. However, she says that with all she wants to do it is a project among many others.

Chapter 9: Conclusions and New Directions to Explore

My first months of fieldwork were a repetition of the challenge of many preconceived notions I had built reading some of the anthropological literature, despite the fact I had attempted to avoid the assumption of anything. On one occasion when we went to a *cantina* to celebrate Sofia's graduation, I asked her intriguingly if it was common for women to drink at *cantinas*. She smiled and said yes. "Even a group of *buga* women?" I continued. This time she laughed and said that it was nothing unusual. It appeared to me that the Mexican women I was meeting were somehow different from the ones I had read about in the anthropological literature, more than often represented as housewives and/or mothers, mostly (when not only) concerned with their households and children. The variability of lives, interests and concerns that women in Mexico City have, struck me even more when my mother came to visit in Mexico City and we had dinner with all of our family. My grandmother spent part of the meal rating the performance of the new president Fox, and other politicians. One of my aunts discussed her new job and one of the festivals she had been organizing for it. After the first course, my cousin and his girlfriend commented on their new apartment. Once in a while, my aunts interrupted the conversations to serve the meal. My uncle skipped dessert to help my cousin who asked for some clues on how to analyze a poem of Sor Juana that she had to hand in for a Spanish class in *prepa*. There was nothing unusual about this dinner, it vaguely resembled other family dinners I had had before. Then it appeared to me that the distance between much of the anthropological literature and the piece of Mexico that had always surrounded me, had been present from the beginning. Many of the first questions I had posed on the field were based on what I had read, which made perfect sense. However, I

thought it interesting that I had come to give much more credit to the written word, than to what had surrounded me for most of my life. This attitude came to a certain extent from my awareness, that not much had been written on the middle-classes but without doubt, I had also relegated these experiences to a separate compartment of my mind, as almost irrelevant to my anthropological knowledge on Mexico. The nicely, tightly woven sentences with long words, and agile, logical acrobatics, often weighed much heavier, than the long afternoon conversations on life and its multiple ramifications. And you reader, which section did you read more carefully, chapter five, six and seven, or the words of Paula, Andrea and Diana? They are different modes of writing, read complementarily, in which the subjectivities of females practicing same-sex sexuality are illuminated through different angles.

Exploring the subjectivities of females practicing same-sex sexuality in relation to dominant ideas has been a productive question to unfold these subjectivities. It has permitted a challenge to the common stereotypes depicting all Mexican women as submissive and self-abnegating housewives. At the same time, it has offered alternative representation to the sexualities of women that are often depicted as passive sexual beings exclusively preoccupied by their fertility. It has also illustrated how ideas are creatively pieced together by subjects.

The practice of female same-sex sexuality does not take place in accordance with most dominant ideas on gender and sexuality available in Mexico City. Nonetheless, as many of the testimonies demonstrate, some of the dominant ideas are partially reappropriated and put together with other ideas, in the context of female same-sex sexuality. For example, the media often represents sexuality as pleasure, but generally

taking place between a man and a woman. Many women practicing sex with women describe sexuality as pleasure. The expression of such opinion is then supported by a dominant idea but at the same time challenges the almost exclusively heterosexual representation of the media. This creative piecing blends ideas that could seem contradictory and aligns them side by side simultaneously or alternatively. Unexpected bridges are built and interstices are filled with ideas produced by subjects.

In the process of writing, I have been left with many questions. Among these interrogations I have asked myself if the subjectivities of women practicing same-sex sexuality really reflect the entrance of new actors who compete over meanings on gender and sexuality. In other words, to which extent have these macro-social changes meant a transformation in the life of people? As there has been little research on women's sexuality in the past, it is difficult to determine if the fact that women speak of their sexuality today in terms other than through the Catholic ideals is unmistakably related to the macro-social changes. I also have to consider my position, which was often the one of a friend of approximately the same age, which certainly influences the information I had access to. During the stage of writing, I often believed that my question should have been: How have the economic and ideological changes in Mexico City affected the subjectivities of females practicing same-sex sexuality? Nonetheless, exploring such a question would have required a different methodology which includes interviewing females practicing same-sex sexuality of various age groups. Once in Montreal, this direction was rather difficult to take. In any case, as there had not been research on female same-sex sexuality in Mexico City, there was everything to say in considering the 22 testimonies of women aged between 19 and 30 years old.

Throughout the thesis I have included small summaries in order to give a fast overview of the information provided in every chapter. In this conclusion I do not intend to summarize all of this information again. Instead I wish to tie some knots that the thesis has let loose until now. This will largely be done by exploring my unanswered question about the extent to which macro-social changes have meant a transformation in subjectivities. I divide this quest in three parts. In the first section I explore the material condition that permitted gay identities to rise in Mexico. Comparing with North America, through D'Emilio's article "Capitalism and Gay Identity" (1997), I analyze the similarities and differences that are to be established for the Mexican case. In a second step I present the relationships between nationalism and lesbian identities. The recent shifts that have occurred in Mexican nationalism have opened a space for the expression of a diversity of identities, contrary to the past where the *mestizo* constituted the only national identity available for the whole country. In the final step I discuss the results of the thesis in questioning if it speaks of social change. More specifically, I ask when or how can we consider that there is social change when looking at the relations between ideas, power and communication, as described in the literature review. I consider where the creative potential of subjects stands in this model, and its possibility of being one of the ingredients contributing to social change. I let new information come through these pages in the hope of illuminating the previous chapters and building bridges between them. In this final chapter I also wish to open doors, suggest new directions for research and leave some questions for future thinking.

9.1 Economic Recessions and Gay Identity

In "Capitalism and Gay Identity" D'Emilio (1997) suggests that the conditions of capitalism are favorable to the development of gay and lesbian identities and communities. The traditional family household that was an economic unit in the agricultural economy became secondary as men and women left for the marketplace of industrial capitalism. In this economic setting, individual labor power became central and thus emphasized individualism. Rather than being considered an economic unit, the family became important for security and emotion, and the number of children decreased. Free of family constraints, men and women began forming their own communities based on gendered and sexual feelings.

Parker (1999) underlines a similar phenomenon for the beginning of gay communities in Brazil. Many of the key elements mentioned by D'Emilio appeared in Brazil, although they emerged at a slightly later point in time. Parker, mentions many of these components:

Here, as in the United states and the countries of Western Europe, processes of industrialization and urbanization have displaced agriculture and household production in a remarkably rapid period of time. Children and procreation have become less necessary, from an economic point of view, and a far reaching economic transition has taken place that is in many ways comparable to the demographic transition in the so-called developed countries. Systems of travel and transportation have made it possible to move widely and rapidly from one location to another in order to attend the demand of the labor market, and although the family has maintained profound ideological and often practical importance, individuals have nonetheless increasingly been able to pursue their objectives and live their lives independent of broader family structure (1999:116).

The changes discussed by Parker have also taken place in Mexico since the 1940's when mechanized agriculture became more common and waves of migrants moved to towns which rapidly became cities. As Amuchástegui (2001:412) remarks, there has been a tendency towards individualization in Mexico, mainly for people living in an urban

context. The family in Mexico is definitely not a production unit, as the tasks of agriculture might have required it to be in previous centuries. Many comparisons can be established with D'Emilio's article since, as we have seen, very similar developments took place in Mexico. Nevertheless, I am interested here in underlining certain differences in the relations between capitalism and its impact on the family in Mexico City, and on sexual identities which will underline some of the important points of this thesis.

One of the essential ingredients that D'Emilio (1997:170) identifies in the conditions that permitted the development of gay identity is "changes in the family that are most directly linked to the appearance of a collective gay life." While it is true that men and women increasingly have a space to live detached from their families, the four pesos devaluations in Mexico since 1976, have also obliged families to unify in the hope of confronting this perpetual crisis. Some of the strategies have included sending women and children to work, and keeping various generations under the same roof. Nonetheless, for Mexican families to remain together is not a novelty, and not strictly a consequence of economic difficulties. As I have discussed, it is traditionally common for men and women to remain at home until marriage, and often after marriage with the husband's side of the family. Carrier (1995) who conducted fieldwork in Guadalajara from the 1960's to the 1990's, found that most unmarried men of all ages in Guadalajara, who participated in his study continued to live with their families at home.

This situation annuls one of the crucial factors which D'Emilio argues was crucial in transforming a rudimentary subculture into a well-developed gay community that then

was already in existence by the time of gay liberation in the 1960's in the US. This factor was the Second World War:

The war severely disrupted traditional patterns of gender relations and sexuality, and temporarily created a new erotic situation conducive to homosexual expression. It plucked millions of young men and women, whose sexual identities were just forming, out of their homes, out of towns and small cities, out of the heterosexual environment of the family, and dropped them into sex-segregated situations- as GIs, as WACs and WAVEs, in same-sex rooming houses for women workers who relocated to seek employment (D'Emilio, 1997:173).

Mexico did not take part in the war, and in any case the country was only starting to live its capitalist transformation in that period. Furthermore, male homosocial bonding has long existed in Mexico. As Lumsden (1991:32), among others, points out, Mexicans, in general, accept "cuatismo" (male bonding). This space for male intimacy, including sexual, has long been available in Mexico. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to imagine that the adoption of a homosexual identity poses great contradictions, specially for active males, who in the active/passive binary are generally seen as any other male.

By contrast, for women leaving the home for work or school, that often requires leaving the neighborhood, has been crucial for grouping around sexual feelings. This does not exclude the possibility that female same-sex relations took place in the immediate neighborhood, as they still do today. However, the possibilities for sharing lesbian identified spaces, and developing a sense of shared experience are narrower if women's only space is the household. Importantly, I must remind that it is not the direct development of capitalism that mainly took women out to work, but rather a specific component of capitalism, which are economic recessions, or better said, it is the strategies of survival that people deployed in front of these recessions that pushed women to join the workforce. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the development of capitalism in Mexico has led to a higher sense of individualism. Work being organized around

individual labor power and the rise of consumer culture are certainly important to consider in the development of the view of a bounded individual self-perception.

In contrast with the conditions that took place in the US during the war and that brought men and women "out of the heterosexual environment of the family" most women and men in Mexico City never fully leave that environment. While some women choose secrecy in front of their families, as the thesis illustrates many of them attempt to open a dialogue within their households, or at least with certain members. Some families cope with it through a "conspiracy of silence about homosexuality" (Carrier, 1989:230), but others prove to be a wonderful support. Families have however a difficult time standing in front of neighbors or in social functions. As Mexican psychologist Rena Reisenfeld (2000) describes in the child-parent dynamic, the "coming-out" of a child often precipitates parents in a "closet" as they have difficulty publicly presenting them as anything other than straight. She suggests that for social change to take place it is not only men and women adopting a gay identity who have to think positively of homosexuality, as is more and more the case in Mexico City, but it is also necessary that people in their environment (that is to say everybody) confront the negative connotations associated to homosexuality. While being taken out of "the heterosexual environment of the family" and living apart might permit individuals to explore sexuality (and other experiences), remaining in the family household might have positive effects on societal transformation when dialogue is possible. Perhaps is it naïve to envision this path for change when knowing that power relations exist within the family and that these are not always to the advantage of certain members (women, children). Nonetheless, for the

majority of women I interviewed, this dialogue was possible and the introduction of different ideas on same-sex sexuality to other family members often took place.

Living with the family also has the consequence of creating no clear residential queer zones. Neighborhoods associated with the *ambiente* are generally upper middle-class areas. They generally count many establishments but they are not known for having many gay and lesbian residents. The only exception might be *Colonia del Valle*, where many people of the *ambiente* are said to live, but which on the other hand does not have any establishments, stores or any other spaces addressed to the queer community. This urban geography does not then reveal the spatial 'ghettoization' of certain individuals. Does this eventually lead towards less social 'ghettoization'? It is a question that I will leave open for now and that is attached to these material conditions, but also to the development of positive and empowering ideas on same-sex sexuality.

9.2 Nationalism and Lesbian Identities

In the preceding chapters I presented the ways in which women self-represent themselves, often privileging the presentation of their voices through testimonies, interview or conversation extracts. These representations are certainly tied to the new ideas on gender and sexuality that have been unfolding in the past decades by various actors who enjoy different, but, privileged locations within power. As discussed in chapter 5, sexual identity was often seen as reflecting an internal and essential truth by the women I met in the field, especially when speaking of the homosexual/heterosexual binary. Rather than exclusively suggesting that such perspective is tied to hegemonic processes, I will propose here that it can be seen as some form of "strategic essentialism" (Spivak, 1990). Examining recent shifts in Mexican nationalism, it becomes clear that

times are favorable to "strategic essentialism" which consists in essentializing oneself for representative purposes. By bringing in the topic of nationalism I hope to illuminate the ways in which women desiring women represent themselves today.

In search of a Mexican identity, the writer Molina Enriquez (1909) was one of the first to manipulate the concept of the *mestizo*. *Mestizo* culture emerged from the Spanish conquest when Spaniards and Native cultures "blend in." A person possessing both heritages would be considered a *mestizo*. Enriquez intended to demonstrate that the *mestizo* formed a real national type that had a similar culture from one end of the country to the other (Fehrechbach, 1995: 487). In subsequent decades, the idea of the *mestizo* transcended national discourse and strongly influenced future writing (see Ramos 1962, Paz 1961, Batra 1987, Vasconcelos 1948).

As Gutmann (1992:56) points out, the national character often based on origin myths, hides class, gender and ethnic divisions within the geographic boundaries of the nation state. The Mexican chronicler Carlos Monsivaís also considers that the unitary character of nationalism is not only a question of ethnicity, but that national types make national men and women and those do not leave room to pluralism (Audiffred, 2000). The idea of claiming any identity challenging national types becomes then a particularly difficult task in such a unitary context.

Since the Revolution, Mexico has undergone profound changes but it is mostly in the past two decades that nationalism has increasingly been confronted. Principally, the introduction of NAFTA and the Zapatista uprising have challenged traditional nationalism. With the introduction of NAFTA, Mexico's traditional view of the USA has been transformed. Morris (1999:365) suggests that this has an impact on national identity

drawing on Edward Said's idea that all societies acquire their identities through juxtaposition. The free trade agreement also gave place to the 1994 Zapatista (EZLN) uprising, although Collier (1994) explains that land reform and exodus to the jungle had kindled the movement during years of clandestine organizing. The rise of the Chiapas conflict marked the date when the concept of diversity entered the mind of Mexicans. Challenging the idea of sameness, the EZLN demanded for a pluralistic nation. As Nash (1997) points out, Zapatista outreach campaigns are to be understood as elements of a broader project of mobilizing civil society and of redefining modernist notions of democracy in a pluriethnic Mexico.

In March 2001, Zapatistas entered Mexico City's Zocalo (Central plaza) to come and dialogue with the new government in power. Thousands of supporters were there to welcome them. Individuals had come to the event but also many clearly identified groups such as worker unions, student alliances, women's groups and sexual minority groups were present. Many groups like the EZLN had an interest in considering Mexico as a plural society and to different extents were collaborating in the same project.

Such change is of crucial importance, since without this shift the mere concept of claiming a specific identity is an impossibility; or at least it takes place in a closed sphere and is difficult to articulate in wider social, cultural and political contexts. It is certainly not a coincidence that in 1999, article 201 of the penal code was adopted. Article 201 makes reference to a plural society, stating that no person can be "molested, discriminated or stigmatized for their sex, age, sexual orientation, race, skin color, language, religion, opinions, social condition, nationality, membership to a native group

or an ethnic minority." The hegemonic view claiming that all Mexicans are *mestizos* has then been shaken and other channels of conceiving the self have been opened.

As I have discussed, women of the *ambiente* in Mexico City regularly categorized themselves and other women in sexual identity terms. I was quite surprised at this recurrent labeling because I was expecting to hear local terms. I also came from the Canadian context in which the notion of queer has gained some importance over specific identities that have been found problematic in their in/exclusionary logic.

As in the rest of North America, during the 1970's and early 1980's lesbian-feminist groups in Mexico debated what constituted a lesbian identity and who was to be included (Mogrovejo, 2000). Nevertheless, pressed by increasing rates of diagnosis of AIDS in the 1980's, by the exclusionary project of identity and perhaps influenced by their Northern neighbors a similar queering process must have taken place in Mexico as we talk today of "diversidad sexual" (sexual diversity) and not only of gays and/or lesbians as was the case at the beginning of the movement. Nonetheless, the "queering" differed from the rest of North America, among other reasons because of the nationalist project that sees *mestizo* identity as unitary.

The Chiapas uprising gave place to the notion of diversity, in permitting specific identities to be put in the map of diversity. As I discuss above, the fervor with which sexual identities were specified might reflect a certain "strategic essentialism." As Spivak (1990:109) argues representation cannot take place without essentialism. Drawing from this point of view, Chicana critic Emma Pérez (1994:105) also points out that as minorities we "have no other choice than to essentialize ourselves strategically and politically against dominant ideologies that serve only to disempower and depoliticize

marginalized minorities." Debates on what constitutes a lesbian do not seem to be very popular today in the movement, which acknowledges sexual diversity. Nonetheless, within this diversity, there seem to be some sites of representation that are put at the forefront, now that the social and discursive space has increasingly become available following the events of 1994.

9.3 Social Change and Creativity

Well some... are married or have children... That depends on what everyone wants to do ... [For some women] the best is to get married and find a man and many women go to school for this (meet a man) but there are others who want to do the best for their own, so then they break with the model of getting married young, or they live in a common law marriage or they are gay or live part time with their boyfriends.

- Sofia

Today as in the past, dominant ideas on gender and sexuality have not always been adopted by women in Mexico City. As Sofia says above, many women marry and have children but others engage themselves in different paths that differ from this model. During the nineteenth century, virginity until marriage and motherhood were considered the "natural" destiny of women. Clearly not all women followed this route since in 1811 one-third of women in Mexico City were single, and from 1830 to 1842 between 18 percent and 33 percent of children born in the capital were illegitimate (Arrom cited in Tuñón Pablos, 1999: 50). So today as in the past there have been significant differences between ideals and practice. Throughout the thesis I have suggested that the seemingly decreased importance of virginity, for example, might reflect social change. But the question is why can I label the 21st century resistance to gender and sexuality ideals a social change, and consider the nineteenth century as a representation of the distance between ideal and practice? When or how does resistance cease to be resistance and translates into social change? Or as I will differently phrase it further down, when do the

multiple creative ways in which men and women seek to shape their lives become accepted or generalized ideas and/or practices?

The task of determining what can be called social change is also rendered difficult in knowing that our ways of writing are influenced by certain currents in academic writing, and some views might be privileged over others. The shift from the universal mode of writing to the particularistic one is very clear when speaking of gender in Mexico. In 1970's anthropology, women were mainly depicted as submissive and self-sacrificing (see Lewis 1961, Stevens 1973, Elmendorf 1977), today many anthropologists attempt to provide a view where diversity predominates and women are not only defined as such (see Browner 1986, Levine, Correa and Uribe 1986, Hubell 1993, Gutmann 1996). Is the fact that women are represented as submissive and self-sacrificing in the written world a question of social change in Mexico or in the discipline?

In a similar way if I found women (*de ambiente* and *buga*) openly speaking of many aspects of sexuality such as eroticism, pleasure, sexual and emotional intimacy, does this speak of social change or of the fact that there is so little research on women's sexuality with which to compare these results? In anthropology, since the 1970's Latin American women's experience is often discussed within the gender and development approach which emphasizes the productive and reproductive aspects of women's lives. In many cases "third-world woman" tend to be represented along a certain model. As Mohanty explains:

This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "third world" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized etc.) This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own decisions (1991: 56).

As Mohanty suggests, this double standard representation, paints a different portrait of Southern and Northern women. Following this train of thought, it is in effect interesting to notice that most research on women's sexuality in Mexico that does not highlight only reproduction has been written in Spanish by academics based in Mexico (Amuchástegui 2001, Rivas Zivy 1998, Figueroa Perea and Rivera Reyes 1993).

Interestingly by contrast research on Latin American males, written in the Western academy, and focused on questions of masculinity and sexuality (ex. Lancaster 1992, Prieur 1998) rarely privileges a development approach. This somehow reflects policy making in gender and development as Gutmann and Chant (2000:6) note, there has been a greater inclusion of men as actors and clients in gender interventions but "strong and substantive recommendations to 'bring men on board' remain rare thus far." Such different approaches tend to depict men as sexual beings while women as preoccupied by their fertility. In the case of Mexico, such monolithic representations echo dominant ideals on sexuality without considering the active ways in which people shape their lives, often far from being the perfect reflection of dominant ideals. In questioning if social change has taken place, one has always to remember that the writings abundantly speak of the writer and her/his context and not only of the space where the research was conducted.

Now reminded of this inevitable bias, I would like nonetheless to explore the question of when is it possible to consider certain ideas or practices as reflecting social change. Labov (1972) who is more interested in linguistic change than specifically social change asks when does a linguistic variation becomes a linguistic change. His point can be useful for reflecting on social change, as he states:

What is the origin of a linguistic change? Clearly not the act of some one individual whose tongue slips, or who slips into an odd habit of his own...Idiosyncratic habits are not a part of language so conceived, and idiosyncratic changes no more so. Therefore we can say that the language has changed only when a group of speakers use a different pattern to communicate with each other... Let us assume that a certain word or pronunciation was indeed introduced by one individual. It becomes part of the language only when it is adopted by others, i.e., when it is propagated. Therefore the origin of a change is in its "propagation" or acceptance by others (Labov, 1972:277).

In other words, social change could be seen as the propagation or the acceptance by others of an idea or practice. This is certainly the point where considering the relationships between ideas and power becomes important since the more closely an idea is intertwined with power, the more through hegemonic processes it might be propagated or accepted. Not only the conjunction of ideas and power is central but it is also important to attend to the question of "how ideas are communicated" (Wolf, 1999:6).

Many of the women I quote throughout the thesis are aware, perhaps in other terms, of the relationship between ideas, power and communication. Some women involve themselves in organizations that struggle over social and cultural meanings, for more positive representations of same-sex sexuality. Through collective struggle, many of these organizations have gained a space within the political and social arena. In this sense they are working within power and in some cases in institutionalized settings. Such an approach has been criticized since as Mogrovejo (1999:332) suggests, the lesbian movement in Mexico is tending "towards institutionalization and the formation of a small elite with the pretension of being representative." Power relations are not excluded within (and between) these organizations and some members might have wider control than others. Nonetheless, organizations are diverse and they might be a springboard for further projects. Paula, for example, joined many sexual diversity organizations and participated in the creation of events and groups. The internet group, which met every two weeks, is a good example of a space that was created out of institutionalized settings and by people

unrelated to any political party. The ways in which positive ideas on female same-sex sexuality are propagated vary. They go from protest, to art exhibits, to participation in TV or radio programs, to providing safe spaces for hanging out, discussion groups or workshops.

Marx who was interested in the conditions of the proletariat perceives that the prerequisite to openly resisting oppression is to be conscious of these conditions (Kliger, 1996: 142). Women practicing sex with women, are aware often before any practice or conscious desire, of the conditions attached to same-sex sexuality. In this context, it seems that an essential ingredient for social change is hope and not only consciousness. Roger Batra (1987) describes the new Mexican character to be caged in modern melancholy, that is to say in a state of feeling no hope for the future as a result of corruption, nonstop chaos and economic degradation. While many of my friends spoke in this tone, many others (or these same ones) said or showed in their actions that they also hoped for change in the future. I believe that the testimonies of Andrea, Paula and Diana, illustrate well the hope for change that they have, and their desire to communicate a different set of ideas on gender and sexuality.

Many organizations are not strictly interested in propagating positive ideas on same-sex sexuality; they wish to provide a space where women can define themselves in their own terms. Discussion groups often invite participants to speak of their own life experience. As Emma Perez (1994:115) suggests in relation to Chicana/Mexicana border lesbian groups in Texas and Chihuahua, such groups provide a space where "a regionally and culturally specific female symbolic can be constructed." These spaces often provide

self-confidence to participants and as the three testimonies presented here illustrate, these spaces are often the turning point in their stories.

The propagation of ideas might be wider through organizations that enjoy a more privileged location within power but as I have presented throughout the thesis, subjects participate in a struggle over meanings. In front of their families for example, many of my friends confronted the image that other family members had of same-sex sexuality. Battling over meaning is not only done in institutionalized settings where ideas flow from the top (actors at favorable locations within power) to the bottom, but also in a horizontal, and transversal perspective, through the multiple connections and relations that take place everyday. The subversions of dominant ideas on a small-scale has become a common topic of research in anthropology that has shifted from large-scale collective insurrections to "small or local resistances not tied to overthrow the systems or even to ideologies of emancipation" (Abu-Lughod, 1990:313). Nonetheless, in Mexico City, this "resistance" to dominant ideas is often tied to "ideologies of emancipation", projected by sexual diversity organizations. It remains that the tactics to make life possible while not adopting dominant ideas are deployed on a daily basis.

Strategies are multiple, and they are not to strictly be seen as a reactive response, but rather as a creative take on life, to make the everyday experience possible. As Gutmann writes in relation to creativity versus resistance:

Cultural creativity is a far more productive concept than resistance in analyzing the inventiveness of the popular classes because it emphasizes not only the desire of ordinary people to react to their life situations, but, more importantly, the active ways in which men and women seek to shape their lives everyday (1996:260).

Whether on a collective level or an individual level creative ways of shaping life set new directions for thinking on gender and sexuality. Whether or not these creative

ideas and practices become generalized depends on the relations between ideas, power and communication. Ways of imagining and living life out of the dominant ideals are very diverse, as the three testimonies illustrate.

Returning to the initial question as to whether or not there has been social change in the areas of gender and sexuality, there are certainly material and ideological ingredients that have redefined life conditions as I discuss in the previous sections. Viewing subjects with creative potential, they have forcefully organized ways of life to match these new conditions. When speaking specifically of female same-sex sexuality, it is rather difficult to speak of what has exactly changed from previous generations, as I focus on women under 30 years old. Only the testimony of Tia, who is in her fifties, suggests that now women show their romantic bonds in public and that spaces of the *ambiente* were more secret before. To my knowledge there are no studies concerning female same-sex sexuality in Mexico City focussing on the period prior to the 1970s, or on non activists during the early years of the movement. Such research is needed if we are to determine how exactly these macro-scale social and economic changes have affected the life of women practicing sex with women. The fact that women work out of the house, for example, only suggests that now same-sex practices might occur with a woman who lives at the other extreme of the city and they might be able to attend spaces of reunion out of their neighborhood. In no case, can I say that female same-sex sexuality is more common today in Mexico City, such practices might previously have been current in one's neighborhood for example. The economic and social change act as a catalyst for a redefinition of meanings and practices of same-sex sexuality. They provoke creative responses that people develop in front of this shifting situation. Creative

responses also shape the horizon of the next era to come. Paula, Andrea and Diana speak of the seeds they plant in their milieu and through collective organizing they work to offer differing ideas on female same-sex sexuality .

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Appendix A: Questionnaire of the Qualitative Interview (English Version)

1. General Information

- 1.1 How old are you?
- 1.2 What is the last year of school you completed?
- 1.3 How do you identify yourself ethnically?
- 1.4 What is your marital status?
- Who do you live with?
1. Do you practise religion? Which?
2. Does your family practise religion? Which?
3. What is your occupation?
4. What is the occupation of your a) father b) mother c) or other
5. Do you have siblings? How many? (where is your family placement?)
6. Do you provide economic contributions to your household?
7. Have you always lived in Mexico City? (no) Where?
8. In what neighbourhood you live in?
9. With which social class do you identify?

2. Themes of Discussion

1. Do you believe that it was different to be a woman in Mexico one generation ago?
2. How would you describe how it was to be a woman one generation ago compared to the present day?
3. a) Do you identify as a woman?
b) (yes) How do feel in relation to the traditional scheme of what it is to be a woman in Mexico?

3. Family Themes

What is your family like ? (What type of person is your mother, father, your extended family? Do you get along with them, etc?)

1. How would you describe your neighbourhood? (What kind of people live there? What is the area like?)
2. At home, what do you remember your mother(or other) telling you about these themes related to sexuality? a) dating b) love c) to be a woman d) men e) sex f) homosexuality
3. At home, what do you remember your father(or other) telling you about these themes related to sexuality? a) dating b) love c) to be a woman d) men e) sex f) homosexuality
4. Why do you practise religion (or not)? And your family?
5. Did you have a quinceañera party? (15th birthday party)

- a) (yes) What was it like?
- b) What did this event signify for your family?
- c) For you?

- 6. a) What did your family say to you when you first menstruated?
- b) How did you feel?

4. Mexican Society

4.1 Was sexuality taught in school? How?

4.2 Do you think that sexuality is discussed in the media? How?

- 4.3 a) Do you think that sexuality is openly discussed in Mexican society?
- b) How?

5. Sexual Preferences

- 5.1 a) Which words do you use to describe your sexuality (sexual preference)?
- b) Why?
- c) Do you remember when you started using these words?

- 5.2 a) Are you attracted to men romantically and/or sexually?
- b) (yes) Why or how?
- c) What do you like about men?

- 5.3 a) When do you remember having your initial attraction to a woman?
- b) Tell me about it (what you felt, thought...)
- c) Why do you think you are attracted to women?
- d) What do you like about women?

- 5.4 a) Does anyone know about your sexual preference? (work, school, friends...)
- b) (yes) Who was the first person you told?

- 5.5 a) Does your family know about your sexual preference?
- b) Tell me how they became aware.
- c) What is the situation like with your family now in relation to your sexual preference?

5.6 In your opinion what has permitted you to affirm your sexual preference (or not)?

6. Love and Sexual Practises

6.1 When you are attracted to someone, how do you let them know?

- 6.2 a) How many relationships have you had (men/women)?
- b) In a few words how would you characterise each of these relationships?

6.3 a) Have you ever been in love?

b) (yes) How did you demonstrate it?

6.4 a) How did you meet your first girlfriend?

b) What was this relationship like ?(Where did you go, how did you feel, what changes did it bring to your life, how was it with the families, friends, etc.)

6.5 a) How did you meet your present girlfriend (or ex-girlfriend).

b) What was this relationship like ?(Where did you go, how did you feel, what changes did it bring to your life, how was it with the families, friends, etc.)

c) What are your plans for the future?

6.6 What would be your ideal partner?

6.7 a) Is fidelity important to you?

b) Have you been unfaithful?

6.8 a) Have you ever had sexual relations? (men/women)

b) From which age (men/women)?

c) What do sexual relations mean to you?

d) What type of women do you like sexually?

e) Have you ever had a one night stand?

6.9 a) Do you believe there are active and passive women?

b) What has been your experience?

7. El ambiente

7.1 A) Can you identify a woman who is attracted to women?

b) How?

7.2 What are the stereotypes of women who are attracted to women?

7.3 a) Have you participated in lesbian events? b) Which ones?

7.4 a) Do you go to ambiente spaces? b) Which ones?

7.5 a) Do you like the ambiente? b) Why?

7.6 a) When did you start going to the ambiente?

b) How did you first arrive at the ambiente?

c) Did it change anything in your life?... (friendships, clothing, style, etc.)?

7.7 a) Are most of your friends from the ambiente?

b) Are they mostly men and/or women?

c) Do you do different things or go to different places with your friends from the ambiente?

7.8 a) ¿Do you believe there are similarities between women who are attracted to women?

b) ¿Which ones?

7.9 a) ¿Do you believe there is a lesbian culture?

b) (yes) How would you describe this culture?

7.10a) Do you feel that you pertain to a community?

8. Living sexualities in Mexico

8.1 a) Do you believe that it is easy to live your sexual preference today in Mexico?

b) Compared to ten years ago, do you believe it is easier today?

c) Why?

8.2 a) Can you identify moments in which you were a victim of homophobia? b) Which ones?

8.3 Would you kiss(romantically) a woman...

a) On a public bus

b) At a family party

c) On a street in your neighbourhood

d) Outside of Mexico City

e) At a lesbian party

8.4 a) Have you seen movies or TV programs with homosexual themes?

b) Which ones?

8.5 a) Have you chatted online on queer sites?

b) (yes) With women of other countries?

c) Do you share similarities with them ?

8.6 a) What do you dream for the near future?

b) Long term?

9. Is there anything else that you would like to mention that we have not discussed...

Appendix B: Questionnaire of the Qualitative Interview (Spanish Version).

1. Información General

- 1.1 ¿Que edad tienes?
- 1.2 ¿Cuál es el último nivel que completaste en la escuela?
- 1.3 ¿A que grupo étnico te identificas?
- 1.4 ¿Cuál es tu estado civil?
- 1.5 ¿Con quien vives?
- 1.6 ¿Practicas una religión? Cuál?
- 1.7 ¿Tu familia practica una religión, cuál?
- 1.8 ¿Cuál es tu ocupación ?
- 1.9 ¿Cuál es la ocupación de tu a) padre b) madre c) o tutor
- 1.10 ¿Tienes hermanos/hermanas? Cuantos? (Rango en familia)
- 1.11 ¿Tienes que aportar un ingreso a casa?
- 1.12 ¿Has vivido siempre en la ciudad de Mexico? (no) ¿Donde?
- 1.13 ¿En que colonia vives?
- 1.14 ¿A que clase social te identificas?

2. Temas de discusión

- 2.1 ¿Tu piensas que era diferente ser mujer en Mexico una generación anterior?
- 2.2 ¿Cómo describirías lo que era ser mujer una generación anterior y lo que es ser mujer hoy para nuestra generación?
- 2.3 a) ¿Tu te identificas como mujer?
- b) (Si) ¿Cómo te sientes frente al esquema tradicional de lo que es ser mujer en Mexico?

3. Siguiendo con el tema de la familia

- 3.1 ¿Cómo es tu familia ? (Que tipo de persona es tu madre, tu padre, tus parientes, como se llevan? Etc.)
- 3.2 ¿Cómo es tu colonia ? (Que tipo de gente vive ahí, que encuentras en la area etc.)
- 3.3 ¿En casa, que recuerdas que te haya dicho tu madre (o otra) acerca de esos temas relacionados con la sexualidad?
 - a) del noviazgo b) del amor c) ser mujer d) de los hombres e) del sexo
 - f) de la homosexualidad
- 3.4 ¿En casa, que recuerdas que te haya dicho tu padre (o otro) acerca de esos temas relacionados con la sexualidad?
 - a) del noviazgo b) del amor c) ser mujer d) de los hombres e) del sexo
 - f) de la homosexualidad
- 3.5 ¿Porque practicas (o no practicas) la religión? Y tu familia?
- 3.6 ¿Tubiste una fiesta de quinceañera?

- d) ¿Cómo fue tu fiesta?
- e) ¿Para tu familia que significa ese evento?
- f) ¿Para ti?

- 3.7 a) ¿Hablando del tema del cuerpo, que te dijo tu familia cuando tuviste tus primeras menstruaciones?
- b) ¿Y como te sentiste?

4 En la sociedad Mexicana

- 4.1 ¿En la escuela se trato el tema de la sexualidad? De que manera?
- 4.2 ¿Tu piensas que se habla de sexualidad en los medios de comunicación? De que manera?
- 4.3 a) ¿Tu piensas que en general, en la sociedad mexicana se habla abiertamente de sexualidad?
- b) De que manera?

5. Preferencias sexuales

- 5.1 a) ¿Que palabras usas para describir tu sexualidad (preferencia sexual)?
- b) ¿Porque?
- c) ¿Recuerdas cuando empezaste a usar esa palabra?
- 5.2 a) ¿Te atraen romanticamente y/o sexual mente los hombres?
- b) (si) ¿Porque piensas que te atraen los hombres?
- c) ¿Que te gusta de un hombre?
- 5.3 a) ¿Cuando recuerdas haber sentido tus atracciones para una persona de tu mismo sexo?
- b) Cuéntame como fue (lo que sentiste, lo que pensaste...)
- c) ¿Porque piensas que te atraen las mujeres?
- d) ¿Que te gusta de una mujer?
- 5.4 a) ¿Alguien conoce tus preferencias sexuales? (trabajo, escuela, amigos...)
- b) (si) ¿A quién se lo anunciaste primero?
- 5.5 a) ¿Tu familia conoce tus preferencias sexuales?
- b) Cuéntame como se enteraron
- c) Cual es la situación con tu familia al momento acerca de tus preferencias sexuales?
- 5.6 ¿En tu opinión, que ha (o no) permitido que tengas la capacidad de afirmar tus preferencias sexuales ?

6. Amores y prácticas sexuales

- 6.1 ¿Cuando alguien te gusta , qué haces para que lo sepa?

- 6.2 a) Cuántos noviazgos tuviste (hombres y mujeres)?
b) ¿En algunas palabras, qué caracterizo cada una de esas relaciones?
- 6.3 a) ¿Has estado plenamente enamorada?
b) (si) ¿Cómo se lo demostrabas?
- 6.4 a) Cuéntame como conociste a tu primera novia
b) ¿Cómo fue su relación ?(Que hacían a dónde iban, cómo se sentían, que cambios aportó en tu vida, cómo fue con las familias, con los amigos etc.)
- 6.5 a) Cuéntame como conociste a tu novia actual (o tu última novia).
b) ¿Cómo es/ fue su relación ?(Que hacían a dónde iban, cómo se sentían, que cambios aportó en tu vida, cómo fue con la familia, con los amigos etc.)
c) ¿Cuáles son sus planes para el futuro?
- 6.6 ¿Cómo sería tu pareja ideal?
- 6.7 a) Para ti es importante la fidelidad?
b) Has sido infiel?
- 6.8 a) ¿Has tenido relaciones sexuales? (con hombres, con mujeres)
b) A partir de qué edad?
c) ¿Qué significan para ti las relaciones sexuales?
d) ¿Qué tipo de mujeres te gustan sexualmente?
e) ¿Has tenido aventuras ?
- 6.9 a) ¿Tu piensas que entre mujeres haya una activa y una pasiva?
b) ¿Cuál es tu caso?
7. El ambiente
- 7.1 a) ¿Puedes reconocer una mujer que tenga una atracción por otra mujer?
b) ¿Cómo?
- 7.2 ¿Cuáles son los estereotipos de las mujeres que tienen sexo con otras mujeres?
- 7.3 a) ¿Has participado en eventos organizados por lesbianas? b) ¿Cuáles?
- 7.4 a) ¿Vas a lugares de ambiente? b) ¿Cuáles?
- 7.5 a) ¿Te gusta el ambiente? b) ¿Porque?
- 7.6 a) Cuando empezaste a ir a lugares de ambiente?
b) ¿Cómo fue tu inicio al ambiente?
c) ¿Cambió algo en ti? (vida, amistades, vestimenta, estilo etc.)
- 7.7 a) ¿La mayoría de tus amigos son de ambiente?

- b) ¿Son hombres y/o mujeres?
- c) ¿Haces cosas diferentes o vas a lugares diferentes con tu amigos de ambiente?

7.8 a) ¿Crees que existen similitudes entre las mujeres que les atraen las mujeres?
b) ¿Cuáles?

7.9 a) ¿Crees que exista una cultura lesbica?
b) (si) ¿En que consiste esa cultura?

7.10a) ¿Sientes que perteneces a una comunidad?

8. Vivir la sexualidad en Mexico

8.1 a) ¿Piensas que es fácil vivir abiertamente tu preferencia sexual hoy en Mexico?
b) ¿En comparación a diez años atrás, crees que sea más fácil hoy?
c) ¿Porque?

8.2 a) ¿Puedes identificar momentos en los que fuiste víctima de homofobia? b) ¿Cuáles?

8.3 ¿Besarias (romanticamente) una mujer en

- f) un pecero
- g) en una fiesta de familia
- h) en una calle de tu colonia
- i) en provincia
- j) en una fiesta lesbica

8.4 a) ¿Has visto películas o programas de televisión con temas homosexuales?
b) ¿Cuáles?

8.7 a) ¿Has chateado por internet en sitios lesbicos?
b) (si) ¿Con mujeres de otros países?
c) ¿Comparten similitudes?

8.8 a) ¿Qué sueñas para un futuro cercano?
b) ¿En un futuro lejano?

9. *Cualquier otra cosa que te gustaría mencionar y que no hemos discutido...*

Appendix C: Questionnaire of the Survey (Spanish and English Version)

1. ¿Cuál es tu edad?

How old are you?

2. ¿Cuál es el último nivel que completaste en la escuela?

What is the last year of school you completed?

3. ¿Cuál es tu estado civil?

What is your marital status?

a) soltera (*single*) b) casada (*married*) c) divorciada (*divorced*) d) otro (*other*)

4. ¿Con quien vives?

Who do you live with?

a) familia (*family*) b) amigos (*friends*) c) sola (*alone*) d) pareja (*partner*) e) otro (*other*)

5. ¿Tienes que aportar un ingreso a casa?

Do you provide economic contributions to your household?

a) *Yes* b) *No*

6. Si tienes que aportar una contribución económica es el...

If you have to provide an economic contribution it is the...

a) 1% to 15% de tu salario (*of your wage*)

b) 15% to 25%

c) 51% to 75%

d) 76% to 99%

e) 100%

6. b) ¿Cuál es tu ocupación?

What is your occupation?

6 c) ¿Cuanto ganas al mes?

What is your salary, per month?

7. ¿A que edad saliste del closet?

How old were you when you came out of the closet?

8. ¿Cuántas parejas de tu mismo sexo has tenido?

How many same-sex partners have you had?

9. ¿Cuántas parejas del sexo opuesto has tenido?

How many partners of the opposite sex have you had?

10. Has tenido relaciones sexuales con personas de tu mismo sexo?

Have you ever had sexual relations with a person of the same sex?

a) yes b) no

11. A que edad tubiste tu primera relación con una persona de tu mismo sexo?

How old were you when you had your first sexual relation with a person of you same sex?

12. ¿Has tenido relaciones sexuales con personas del sexo opuesto?

Have you ever had sexual relations with a person of the opposite sex?

a) yes b) no

13. ¿A que edad tubiste tu primera relación con una persona del sexo opuesto?

How old were you when you had your first sexual relation with a person of the opposite sex?

14. ¿En el último año (Ej. De agosto 2000 a agosto 2001) con cuantas personas de tu mismo sexo has tenido relaciones sexuales?

In this year, (Ex. From August 2000 to August 2001) with how many people of your same-sex have you had sexual relations?

a) 1 c) 4-5 e) 11-15 g) 20 and +
b) 2-3 d) 6-10 f) 15-20 h) ninguna (none)

15. ¿En el último año (Ej. De agosto 2000 a agosto 2001) con cuantas personas del sexo opuesto has tenido relaciones sexuales?

In this year, (Ex. From August 2000 to August 2001) with how many people of the opposite sex have you had sexual relations?

c) 1 c) 4-5 e) 11-15 g) 20 and +
2-3 d) 6-10 f) 15-20 h) ninguna (none)

16. ¿Piensas que existen roles en las relaciones entre mujeres?

Do you believe that there are roles in female same-sex sexuality?

Opinión: _____

17. Piensas que existe en las relaciones sexuales entre mujeres el esquema de la activa y la pasiva? *Do you beleive that in sexual relations between women there is the scheme of the active and the passive?*

a) yes b) no

18. Si crees que existe el esquema de la activa y la pasiva, que te consideras?

If you believe that there is the scheme of the active and pasive, what do you consider yourself?

a) active b) pasive

19. ¿Cuales de esas practicas has realizado sobre tus parejas de mismo sexo? (Es decir por ejemplo, que TU la hayas penetrado, tocado el clitoris etc.). *Which of these practices*

have you realize on your same-sex partners? That is to say that YOU penetrated her, touched her clitoris etc.)

- a) estimulación del clitoris (*clitoral stimulation*)
- b) cunilingus (estimulación oral del clitoris) (*cunilingus*)
- c) penetración vaginal (*vaginal penetration*)
- d) Penetración anal (*anal penetration*)
- e) Uso de juguetes sexuales (tipo vibrador, dildo etc.) (*use of sexual toys*)
- f) Otros (¿Cuales?) _____ (*Other (Which ones)*)

20. ¿ Cuales de esas practicas tus parejas de mismo sexo han realizado sobre ti? (Es decir por ejemplo, que ELLA te haya penetrado, tocado el clitoris etc.). *Which of these practices your same-sex partner has realized on you? That is to say that SHE penetrated you, touched your clitoris etc.)*

- g) estimulación del clitoris (*clitoral stimulation*)
- h) cunilingus (estimulación oral del clitoris) (*cunilingus*)
- i) penetración vaginal (*vaginal penetration*)
- j) Penetración anal (*anal penetration*)
- k) Uso de juguetes sexuales (tipo vibrador, dildo etc.) (*use of sexual toys*)
- Otros (¿Cuales?) _____ (*Other (Which ones)*)

21. Classifica estas practicas, del 1 al 6. 1 es la practica que haces la más seguido en tus relaciones sexuales con personas de tu mismo sexo, 6 la practica que haces con menos frecuencia. *Classify these practices from 1 to 6. 1 is the practice that you do the most often in your sexual relations with a same-sex partner, 6 is the practice that you do the least.*

- | | |
|---|---|
| Estimulación del clitoris (<i>clitoral stimulation</i>) | cunilingus (<i>cunilingus</i>) |
| Vaginal penetración (<i>vaginal penetration</i>) | penetración anal (<i>anal penetration</i>) |
| Uso de juguetes sexuales (<i>use of sexual toys</i>) | otros (<i>cuales</i>) (<i>other which ones</i>) |

Glossary

Abnegada: A self-sacrificing and suffering woman.

Ambiente: A variety of spaces addressed to the sexual minorities population. The word can also refer to an individual having a sexual preference distinct to the heterosexual one.

Andale: Let's go!

Banda: Music traditionally being played in Northern of Mexico.

Bisexual: Bisexual

Bonbonsito: A sweet word to say to a lover, which mean little candy.

Buga: Popular word for heterosexual

Cabrón: A very masculine man. More than often it has a similar meaning to bastard. Close male friends may use it to refer to each other.

Cachonda: A woman who exhibits a flirtatious and sexy behaviour.

Calentura: Literally means fever but in here it is a metaphor for a strong and passionate sexual desire.

Canija: An insult to a woman that can be translated as approximately "bitch."

Cariñito: A sweet word for loved ones, similar to my dear.

Centro Historico: The historical center is the oldest part of Mexico City.

Chido: Cool!

Chilango/a: A Mexico City inhabitant.

Chingada: In Mexican nationalism, as described by Paz (1961), it is the native woman who was raped by Spaniards. Colloquially it is used today as a curse.

Chingar: To fuck, to screw. This verb might also mean a sexual or a social violation. As in "*el presidente nos chinga*" (The president screws us over)

Chingón: In Mexican nationalism, as described by Paz (1961), the chingón is the aggressive Spaniard male who raped native women. Colloquially it is used today as an adjective meaning great, as in *una fiesta chingona* (a great party).

Colonia: Neighborhood.

Compadre: Literally means godfather, but in the *ambiente* it is sometimes used for a woman of a masculine appearance who most likely plays the active role in a relationship.

Coyoacán: A neighborhood located in the Southern part of Mexico City.

Despedida de soltera: Bridal shower.

Diversidad Sexual: Generally refers to the sexual diversity movement.

Estado de Mexico: State of Mexico is the neighboring state of the DF.

Fem: A female who takes the role of the passive woman in the *ambiente*. The word seems to have derived from the North American term femme, as in butch/femme.

Guey: A colloquial way to address a friend, it is similar to "dude".

Hermana: Sister

Hermanito: Little brother

Hija: Daughter

Inter: Short for *internacional*.

Internacional: A person who takes active and passive sexual roles. As it literally mean international, it originally made reference to a foreigner who practiced same-sex sexuality.

Joto/a: A male who is a feminine passive homosexual.

Jueguito: Little game

Lesbiana: *Lesbian*

Leslie: A playful, secret coded way to say lesbian. It can also be the name of a woman.

Levis: A playful, secret coded way to say lesbian, it literally makes reference to the brand of jeans Levis Strauss.

Lila: A playful secret coded way to say lesbian that literally means the color purple.

Loca: A woman who defies by behavior the traditional ideals of her gender. Literally it means crazy woman.

Macha: The feminine version of *macho*, which refers to a woman who embodies the characteristics of the cult of machismo.

Machista: Is an adjective that refers to macho. A person, a movie or a company can be machista for example.

Macho: A mythical masculine figure who is adept to the cult of virility in which exaggerated aggressiveness, hunger for control, and sexual potency are exhibited.

Machora: A masculine female who embodies the macho.

Mamita: An affectionate word meaning little mother. It is also use as a flattering remark for flirting.

Marianismo: A term used in the social sciences, as machismo, marianismo is a cult that celebrates the capacity to endure suffering of Latin American women.

Marimacha: A woman who embodies the macho.

Maricon: A derogatory way of designing an effeminate male practicing same-sex sexuality.

Mestizo: A person of Spanish and Indian ancestry.

Mexica: The popularly know Aztec prehispanic culture.

Novio/a: Boyfriend, girlfriend.

Ojete: An insult to a woman as in "bitch."

Orale: An expression that approximately means "Here we go."

Pareja: Partner

Pinche: A curse, generally used as an adjective and which means something close to "goddamned" or "fucking".

Piropo: A verbal performance which has the intention of flattering or catching the attention of a woman that is considered attractive.

Prepa: Short form of saying *Preparatoria*

Preparatoria: Grades 11 to 13th which would correspond to high school.

Put: Whore

Puto: Is the masculine of *puta*. Literally it would mean a sex worker but it is also a slang term of calling a male practicing same-sex sexuality as in "fairy" or "queen."

Quinceañera: A celebration that takes place when girls turn 15 in many Latin American countries.

Secundaria: Junior high school.

Suegra: Mother in law.

Sumisa: A woman who is submissive.

Telenovela: Mexican soap opera

Tiempo Libre: A weekly publication which advertises cultural events that will take place during the week.

Tortillera: A woman who make tortillas. In slang, it can mean a female who practices same-sex sexuality.

Trangénero: Transgender

Vecindad: A small building of one room apartments.

Universidad: University.

Vieja: Literally refers to an old woman. However, it is of used for women of any age, in a derogatory tone