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Universidad de Granada

For and Against Sex Education in Mexico in the 1930s. Discourses about Gender and Sexuality

by
Ana Isabel Enríquez Vargas

Submitted to the Department of Gender Studies, Central European University
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in
Women's and Gender Studies

Main supervisor: Francisca de Haan (Central European University)
Second supervisor: Teresa Ortiz Gómez (University of Granada)

Budapest, Hungary

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Approved by: _____

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ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
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RUTGERS



Universiteit Utrecht

To my grandmother Rita, who I barely met but who taught my mother to be courageous,
to my mother who passed that knowledge to me, and to my friend Zarina,
who supported me in the last months of thesis writing.

When I began menstruating, the summer before I started ninth grade, my mother gave me a speech, telling me that I was to let no boy touch me, and then she asked if I knew how a woman get pregnant. I told her what I had been taught in science, about the sperm fertilizing the egg, and then she asked if I knew how, exactly, that happened. I saw the terror in her eyes and so, though I knew that aspect of procreation as well, I lied, and told her it hadn't been explained to us.

A Bengali girl growing up in the United States,
in the short story "Hell-Heaven."¹

Jhumpa Lahiri

¹ Jhumpa Lahiri, 'Hell-Heaven', in *Unaccustomed Earth* (India: Random House India, 2009).

Abstract

This thesis analyses the debates surrounding the first initiative to introduce school-based sex education in Mexico in the 1930s. I focus especially on the constructions of gender and sexuality that were expressed within these discussions. During the presidency of Abelardo Rodríguez (1932-1934), the Ministry of Education (SEP), headed by Narciso Bassols, supported the idea that sex education should be a compulsory subject in public schools and began the procedures for its implementation. The SEP viewed sex education as a social problem requiring the intervention of the state. I argue that this initiative of sex education can be seen as part of a biopolitical project intending to regulate the lives of individuals in society for both individuals' and society's wellbeing. Second, I posit that it carried specific and varied content for men and women while promoting "ideal" forms of sexuality. A strong opposition to the implementation of sex education in schools was organized, and considered especially important to parents' associations with Catholic orientation. They opposed the ongoing process of the secularization of schools and denounced sex education. In 1934, Bassols had to resign from office in part due to the protests against sex education. After this initiative, it took Mexico nearly 40 years to have a program of sexual education in primary schools. In fact, sex education continues to be an issue of public debate. From my perspective, this initiative offers an opportunity to scrutinize how actors such as the state, physicians and religiously oriented organizations intended to redefine what it was to be a man or a woman, and the ideal of female and male sexuality. Thus, this study looks at how different actors in the national realm worked to construct both gender and sexuality. By thoroughly examining these debates, I analyze how the role of women in society, and their behavior in private and public life, was being shaped by various factors. Likewise, it will highlight the backlash that

the changing role of women in society was causing at the time, and how various actors attempted to influence their position. In addition, my research will allow me to explore how medical discourses contributed to creating normative ideals of gender difference and heterosexuality while simultaneously medicalizing all alternatives as “deviant.”

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List of abbreviations

ADC	Asociación de Damas Católicas (Association of Catholic Ladies)
AMUWIF	Association of Mexican University Women or
ANM	Academia Nacional de Medicina (National Medicine Academy)
ANPLE	Asociación Nacional Pro Libertad de Enseñanza (National Association for the Freedom of Teaching, or ANPLE)
BF	Brigadas Femeninas de Santa Juana de Arco, (Women's Brigades of Saint . Joan of Arc)
BNMR	Bloque Nacional de Mujeres Revolucionarias (National Bloc of Revolutionary Women)
CEP	Consejo de Educación Primaria (Primary School Board)
CEPDF	Consejo de Educación Primaria del D. F. (Mexico City Primary School Board)
CFO	Círculo Feminista de Occidente (Western Feminist Circle)
CMOyC	Congreso de Mujeres Obreras y Campesinas (Congress of Women Workers and Peasants),
CNC	Confederación Nacional Campesina (National Peasant Confederation)
CNM	Consejo Nacional de Mujeres Mexicanas (National Council of Mexican Women)
CNOP	Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (The National Confederation of Popular Organizations)
COM	Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of World Workers)
CTC	Comisión Técnica Consultiva (Advisory Technic Commission)
CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores de México (Confederation of Mexican workers)
DIM	Encyclical letter Divini Illius Magistri, or DIM
ENP	Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (National Preparatory High School).
FAPF	Federación de Agrupaciones de Padres de Familia del D.F (Mexico City Parent's Association Federation)
FPAWC	First Pan-American Women's Congress

FUPDM	Frente Único Pro Derechos de la Mujer (Sole Front for Women's Rights)
GIRE	Grupo de Información y Reproducción Elegida, (Group for Choice and Information on Reproduction)
IFUW	International Federation of University Women
JCFM	Juventud Femenina Católica Mexicana (Association of Young Women Catholics)
LIMIH	Liga Internacional de Mujeres Ibéricas e Hispanoamericanas (League of Iberian and Hispano-American Women)
LNDLR	Liga Nacional para la Defensa de la Libertad Religiosa (National League for the Defense of Religious Liberty)
PALEW	Mexican branch of the Pan-American League for the Elevation of Women
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)
PCEP	Primer Congreso de Enfermeras y Parteras (First Congress of Nurses and Midwives)
PFR	Partido Feminista Revolucionario (Feminist Revolutionary Party)
PJEE	Primeras Jornadas Eugénicas Españolas (First Spanish Eugenic Days)
PLM	Partido Liberal Mexicano (Mexican Liberal Party)
PLN	Partido Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Party)
PNR,	Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party)
PRM	Partido de la Revolución Mexicana
SEM	Sociedad Eugénica Mexicana Para el Mejoramiento de la Raza (Mexican Eugenic Society for the Improvement of Race)
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of Public Education)
SIPBA	Secretaría de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes (Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts)
SMP	Sociedad Mexicana de Puericultura (Mexican Society of Childcare)
SPSM	Société française de prophylaxie sanitaire et morale (French Society for . . . Health and Moral Prophylaxis)
STD	Sexually transmitted diseases
UFCM	Union Femenina Católica Mexicana (Mexican Catholic Women's Union)
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

UNPF Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia (National Parent's Union)
YWCA Young Women's Cristian Association

Introduction

In early twentieth century Mexico sex education began to be discussed in progressive groups, influenced by feminist, eugenic or socialist ideas. This was part of a worldwide tendency, influenced by new theorists including Sigmund Freud, to consider sexuality as a central place in the construction of the individual. At the same time, issues related to sexuality came to be viewed as connected to the well-being of the community or the nation. Consequently, sexuality became a focus of public intervention through the production of knowledge that would help to direct the sexual behaviour of people towards “ideals” that were considered beneficial for the individual, society and the state.¹ The influence of Freud’s theories on the sexual development of children, the idea that children needed to know how to manage their sexuality, and concerns on the influence of venereal diseases in the degeneration of the “race” were important motivations in promoting sex education around the world, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century. In early 1930s Mexico, the Ministry of Education (SEP) introduced a project of school-based sex education starting in primary school. This initiative was preceded by Mexico’s participation in the Pan American Child Congress held in Lima Peru on 1930s. The resolutions of the congress as well as a series of studies presented in 1932 to the SEP by the Mexican Eugenic Society for the Improvement of Race or SEM encouraged the Mexican government to implement school-based sex education ² The SEM studies dealt with the sexual behavior of teenagers and showed concern about early pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and “sexual deviations”. The SEM suggested that education should

¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1978).

² Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México* (Mexico: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1934), 3–4.

serve to prevent these problems and suggested guidelines on the adoption of sex education in Mexico.³ Minister of Education Narciso Bassols began procedures to implement sex education in 1932. The initiative stimulated a public discussion and held debates in the press, where different actors espoused their views and mobilized their resources in favour of or against sex education. Some of the actors in favour were physicians, teachers and journalists, including some women. More women participated in Parents' associations opposing the initiative, which they felt like infringed on the right to teach religion in schools. Their resistance proved so influential that it prompted Bassols' resignation in 1934. After Bassols left office, his initiative failed as well. Following this first failure to establish sex education in schools, it took Mexico nearly four decades to pass a similar initiative for primary schools.⁴

Scholars remember this first attempt to introduce sex education in Mexico as either a progressive, ahead-of-its-time initiative of the revolutionary government,⁵ or as a triumph of the Catholic organizations (including many women) opposing state policies.⁶ But the content of both the initiative and the debates for and against it had remained nearly unexplored in terms of gender and sexuality. I want to ask what was considered “progressive” in this initiative for women and non-heterosexual people, or conversely, what this “triumph” meant

³ John A. Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México I. Los Años de Bassols 1931-1934*, SEP-Setentas 287 (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1976), 98.

⁴ Ruiz Cruz, Juana J, 'Controversias Generadas Por Los Contenidos de Educación Sexual En Las Reformas Curriculares de Educación Primaria', *Caminos Abiertos. Revista de La Universidad Pedagógica Nacional*, no. 173 (July 2008), <http://caminosabiertos2008.blogspot.hu/2008/07/controversias-generadas-por-los.html>. Laura Suárez refers that sex education in secondary schools was implemented in Mexico in 1940s but there are not studies that focus on this second initiative, apparently successful, of the government to introduce sex education. Laura Luz Suárez y López Guazo, *Eugenesia Y Racismo En México* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005), 244.

⁵ Monsiváis, Carlos, *El Estado Laico Y Sus Malquerientes* (Nezahualcóyotl: UNAM-Random House Mondadori, 2008), 123–7.

⁶ Mary Kay Vaughan, 'Introduction', in *Sex in Revolution. Gender Politics and Power in Modern México*, ed. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 30.

for them. I think this initiative offers an opportunity to scrutinise how actors like the state, physicians and religiously oriented organizations tried to redefine what it was to be a man or a woman, and what was constructed as the ideal sexuality for men and women. Thus, this study looks at how different actors in the national realm worked to construct both gender and sexuality. I think by going deep into these debates I can find how the place of women in society and their behavior in private and public life were being redefined by different factors. Likewise, it can shed light on the opposition that the changing role of women in society was causing and how different actors tried to influence it. In addition, my research will allow me to explore how medical discourses contributed to create normative ideals of gender difference and heterosexuality while simultaneously medicalizing all alternatives as “deviant.” In this research, I will also highlight the influence of women in the fight over the implementation of sex education, as they have been mostly ignored in the existing historiography.

My research was guided by the following question:

1. How were gender and sexuality constructed by different actors in the debates about sex education?

Other questions that influenced my analysis were: Was the content of sex education the same for boys and girls? What were the agendas and interests of the people and groups involved? How were women’s bodies being appropriated by different actors? How did eugenic ideas of prevention of venereal diseases and responsible parenthood influence the proposal?

My theoretical framework is composed first of Joan Scott’s definition of gender as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the

sexes”, and as “a primary way of signifying relationships of power.”⁷ Secondly, I use Foucault’s notions of sexuality as a historical practice and the concept of biopolitics. The concept of biopolitics implies that power is exercised not only from a central position but that the process of the creation and diffusion of discourses regulates the life of individuals, in which sexuality is of central importance.⁸ Thus, I propose to look at how relationships were structured in terms of gender and sexuality with a particular focus on women and non-heterosexual people who are often put in a disadvantaged position in relation to the distribution of resources in society. In general, I adopt a social constructionist approach and use content or textual analysis as my methodology for reviewing my sources.⁹ The sources I analyse consist of newspaper articles, from the pro-government *El Nacional* and the conservative *Excelsior*, plus a collection of newspapers articles published by the SEP.¹⁰ Even though the majority of these articles are written by men, they also contain some written by women. I also examine a book published by a physician and a teacher in 1933 on the topic of school-based sex education, some lectures published by the SEM and other archival documents like letters sent to the president by mothers and fathers to ask for the cancellation of the program of sex education and some handouts and letters in a Catholic archive.¹¹

My research will fill the gap of a gendered analysis of the history of sex education in Mexico. The debates over the first proposal of sex education in Mexico had not been studied from a gender perspective, meaning that the ideals of being male and female expressed in

⁷ Joan W. Scott, ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1053–75. 1067.

⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction*.

⁹ Theories, sources and methodology are explained in detail in Chapter 1.

¹⁰ Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*.

¹¹ The full reference of these documents is provided in Chapter 1, section 1.2.1., where I describe them in detail.

this context were left unexplored. Similarly, previous works left out the effect differing views on sexuality had on policy. Also, the transnational nature of sex education and how the different theories that informed sex education were appropriated in Mexico have not been considered. In addition, the participation of women as supporters or opponents of the initiative has been, until now, mostly neglected.

I think a study with a focus on gender and sexuality on the first Mexican initiative regarding sex education can help to identify the active participation of different actors –the state, physicians, women, parents associations –in the construction of gender and sexuality. It can show, for example, how traditional gender roles of men as breadwinners and women as wives and mothers were mandated by the law and supported by medical ideas and conservative opinions. Likewise, it can demonstrate how pleasure and sexuality were defined as masculine and women were conceptualized as asexual and reproductive beings. Also, it unveils how homosexuality or practices like masturbation were constructed as pathological because of the importance given to reproduction.

Apart from signaling a research gap I think it is important to examine history with the concerns of the present. In present Mexican society we have at least four elements that we share with the 1930's context. First, we have a system of double moral standards in terms of sexuality that affects women. By this I mean that from the time they are teenagers, men are allowed more freedom than women regarding sexuality. This leads to a tighter control of women throughout their lives, inhibiting their ability to lead autonomous lives. Society judges women for having a sexual life before marriage, and there are stronger social reprimands for females than for men in cases of infidelity in a heterosexual relationship. Women are also being assassinated by ex-partners due to a strong sense of entitlement and

ownership males feel over the bodies of women. Of course Mexico is many Mexicos, and I think a minority of families with a liberal tradition can be more egalitarian on issues of sexuality with the young of both sexes. But a big number of families that are strongly influenced by Catholic morality still believe women's morality depends on their chastity before marriage, still see heterosexual marriage as the only legitimate place for sexuality, and sustain a double moral standard for men and women.¹² Catholic morality continues to influence public policies that limit women's right to control their bodies. Abortion has only been legal in Mexico City since 2007. Unfortunately this more progressive legislation produced a backlash of state legislations –18 out of 32 states – decided to change their constitutions to protect life since conception, thus criminalizing women who have abortions.¹³ Second, we are reluctant to talk about sexuality issues, which I think leads to a situation of vulnerability for many women. I think if a young woman cannot legitimately exercise her sexuality, if she decides to go against the mandate of chastity, she is forced to live this aspect of her life with secrecy. The consequences of this range from lack of counselling in her sexual and emotional life, early pregnancies, to young women being seduced by older men, or women being blamed in case of rape or unable to file a report for fears that their family and the legal authorities would find them guilty. I argue that this double moral standard that makes girls lie about where they go in order not to have their sexuality

¹² The following data can help to give an idea of the dominance of Catholic values in Mexican society: the 1950's census marked that 98.2 per cent of the adult population was Catholic, this number had decreased to 89.2 per cent in 2010 showing still a very strong majority. Source INEGI.

¹³ The last state to pass this kind of legislation was Veracruz on 28 July 2016. In Mexico in most states abortion is legal in case of rape, child malformations, or health risk to the mother. In the case of rape, many of the victims do not receive the orientation to make use of emergency contraception or abortion. Eirinet Gómez, 'Aprueban Perseguir El Aborto En Veracruz, a Iniciativa de Duarte', *La Jornada*, 29 July 2016; 'Sonora Negó Aborto a Niña Violada', *El Universal*, 3 August 2016, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/estados/2016/08/3/sonora-nego-aborto-nina-violada-analizan-traslado-cdmx>.

policed is a disadvantage when crimes like date-rape or more extreme cases happen.¹⁴ Third, there is a lot of discrimination towards non-heterosexual people. According to data obtained by civil society organizations from 1994 to 2014 there were 1,218 murders for homophobia.¹⁵ These numbers put Mexico second place in the world for this kind of crime, after only Brazil.¹⁶ Luis Perelman, a LGBTI leader expresses that this is a kind of discrimination in which the worst enemy is the family, with 40 percent of Mexicans declaring that they will not live in the same house as a homosexual person.¹⁷ In recent years there have been advances in terms of LGBT rights in Mexico. Same sex marriage has been legal in Mexico City since the year 2010, and now seven other states have allowed it. In addition, a new law proposed by the President is being discussed, which would make it legal in the whole country.¹⁸ I hope that these measures and others will help to end the everyday discrimination and the

¹⁴ I will provide one horrendous example of this situation that happened on June 2013. A young man, 19 years old, Javier Mendez Ovalle murdered Sandra Camacho, 17 years old. Javier was from a middle-upper-class family and Sandra came from a poor one. Javier offered Sandra to find a job and they went together to the cinema and then to Javier's apartment. It is very likely that Sandra was raped, then killed in that very place. To get rid of Sandra's body Javier cut off her arms and legs, placed the parts on plastic bags and carried them to different parts of the city at night. Thanks to information on Sandra's social media, Javier was suspected and later captured, but nobody in Sandra's family knew where she was the day that the crime occurred. To the cruelty of this case was added that a journalist did a chronic of the crime taking the position of the murdered and putting all the blame of the crime on the victim. This article was: Alejandro Sánchez González, 'El Joven Que Tocaba El Piano (Y Descuartizó a Su Novia)', *Emeequis*, 21 September 2014, <http://www.m-x.com.mx/2014-09-21/el-joven-que-tocaba-el-piano-y-descuartizo-a-su-novia-int/>. There were many responses to this article, see for example: Catalina Ruiz-Navarro, 'El Joven Que Descuartizó a Su Novia (y Tocaba El Piano)', *Catalinapordios*, 25 September 2014, <https://catalinapordios.com/2014/09/25/el-joven-que-descuartizo-a-su-novia-y-tocaba-el-piano/>.

¹⁵ From this 1,976 affected homosexual men, 226 trans people (travesties, transgender and transsexual) and 226 homosexual women. Although they recognize that the number of assassinations of homosexual women may be under reported because they get classified as crimes against women (feminicidio) but the homophobic motivation of these crimes is not specified. Sara Pantoja, 'México, Segundo Lugar Mundial En Crímenes Por Homofobia', *Proceso*, 11 May 2015, <http://www.proceso.com.mx/403935/mexico-segundo-lugar-mundial-en-crimenes-por-homofobia>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Luis Pablo Beauregard, 'Peña Nieto Propone Legalizar El Matrimonio Gay En Todo México', *El País Internacional*, 18 May 2016, http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2016/05/17/actualidad/1463519669_299513.html.

¹⁸ Ibid.

homophobic and transphobic crimes that occur in my country.¹⁹ Fourth, sex education remains a very polemical issue in Mexico nowadays. Like a déjà vu of the debates of the 1930s, the parents association of the state of Nuevo Leon and the local and federal deputies of the National Action Party or PAN agreed in a meeting in the local congress in the city of Monterrey, the third most important in Mexico, to rip out the pages of text books that contain information about sex, the human body or contraception. In addition, one of the most active organizations against sex education in the 1930s continues to exist, the National Parents Union or UNPF, and they continue to lobby against same sex marriage and the inclusion of issues of sexual diversity in school-based sex education.²⁰ On the other hand, feminist organizations like Group for Choice and Information on Reproduction or GIRE as well as physicians point out the limitations that sex education has nowadays in Mexico and advocate for a greater diffusion on reproduction issues with a focus on gender equality and women's human rights.²¹ Physician Juan Luis Alvarez-Gayou, director of the Mexican Sexology Institute or Imesex, believes that the sex education Mexicans receive is very limited, which is reflected in high rates of teenage mothers - with 600 000 who give birth before being 19

¹⁹ This new law that is being discussed also proposes to make easier a change of gender in official documents. A procedure to change gender in official documents exists in Mexico City since 2015. 'Se ganan su lugar... el año de las transgénero', *actitudfem*, n.d., <http://www.actitudfem.com/entorno/genero/lgbt/las-transgenero-en-mexico-datos>.

²⁰ Teresa Moreno, 'Diversidad Sexual No Debe Incluirse En Libros de Texto: UNPF', *El Universal*, 17 June 2016, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/sociedad/2016/06/17/diversidad-sexual-no-debe-incluirse-en-libros-de-texto-unpf>; Teresa Moreno, 'Piden a Gobernadores Ir Contra Matrimonios Iguualitarios', *El Universal*, 6 June 2016, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/sociedad/2016/06/6/piden-gobernadores-ir-contra-matrimonios-iguualitarios>.

²¹ Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida or GIRE was founded in 1991 by Mexican Feminists Martha Lamas, Patricia Mercado, María Consuelo Mejía, Sara Sefchovich and Lucero González. '¿Quiénes Somos?', *GIRE*, accessed 10 August 2016, <https://www.gire.org.mx/gire/quienes-somos>.

years old every year.²² For all these reasons I think that studying the debates about sex education in Mexico in the early 1930's can make a contribution to knowing how our society has constructed gender and sexuality issues in the past and being able to evaluate if those ideas have changed, and in what ways, or if they continue to influence our present lives.

The thesis is structured in seven chapters. In **Chapter 1**, I explain the theories and methodology that guided my analysis. In **Chapter 2**, I present the literature review. In this chapter I first focus on what are recent approaches in the historical study of sex education; then I analyze three examples of studies on sex education, in France, Spain and Uruguay, respectively; and then I situate this research with what has been written before in the 1930s initiative to introduce sex education in Mexico. **Chapter 3** provides the historical context of the initiative. It focuses on three areas: the political events in Mexico since the Revolution 1910 to 1934, the development of educational policies, and women's situation in society and activism. In **Chapter 4**, I concentrate on the historical precedents of sex education in Mexico, that come from two areas, women's interventions about sexuality and eugenic ideas that became institutionalized since the 1920s in educational and health policies. In **Chapter 5**, I focus on the development of the initiative since 1932 when the SEP considered implementing sex education to 1934 when the project was aborted. I try to consider all the actors that participated, emphasizing the role of women and analyzing their motivations to enter in this debate, trying to understand the reasons for the failure of the initiative connected with the social and political circumstances of the time. **Chapter 6** explores the strategy of supporters of sex education and the implications of gender and sexuality that were present in the content

²² 'Los Mexicanos, Reprobados En Educación Sexual', *Salud Y Medicinas*, 19 May 2016, <http://www.saludymedicinas.com.mx/centros-de-salud/salud-femenina/articulos/los-mexicanos-reprobados-en-educacion-sexual.html>.

of the debates over the initiative and in the different programs that were suggested. In **Chapter 7**, I analyze the strategy and arguments of the opposition in terms of gender and sexuality. In the Conclusion Chapter, I answer my main research question contrasting how gender and sexuality were constructed by proponents and adversaries of sex education.

Chapter 1. Theoretical and methodological framework

In this chapter I will discuss the theories and methodologies that will guide my analysis of the first initiative to introduce school-based sex education in elementary schools in Mexico in the 1930s. First I will introduce Joan Scott's definition of gender. Second I will present Michel Foucault's notions of discourse, sexuality and biopolitics. Third I will focus on the relation of biopolitics with sex education. Fourth I will present the constructivist approach in the history of science as an important approach for this research. This framework will serve my purpose of researching how gender and sexuality were being constructed in the debates around the introduction of sex education. In the second part of this chapter I will explain what are my primary sources and discuss content or textual analysis as my main research method.

1.1. Theoretical framework

1.1.1. Scott's definition of gender

In 1986 Scott elaborated an influential definition of gender,¹ that accordingly to historian Susan Kent “would inform virtually all scholarship on gender [history] from that moment on.”² In this research I will use Scott's definition, which consists of the following two propositions: “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.”³ She differentiates four interrelated elements in her first proposition: gender representations or symbols; normative concepts of gender; the exploration of gender in areas

¹ Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', 1053–75.

² Susan Kingsley Kent, 'The Road to "Gender"', in *Gender and History* (China: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 55. On the influence of Scott's definition of gender see also: 'AHR Forum. Revisiting "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis". Introduction', *American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (December 2008): 1344–45.

³ Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', 1067.

of life such as economy, the market and politics; and the formation of subjective identities.⁴ I consider the first two elements as especially relevant for this research. Representations of gender will allow me to explore how the categories of men and women were being constructed in the 1930s Mexico. The normative concepts of gender would help me to identify how ideal ways of being a man or a woman were used to close or open up men's and women's possibilities by different social groups or actors. Scott's second proposition centers on "the reciprocal nature of gender and society and ... the particular and contextually specific ways in which politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics."⁵ In her examples of this proposition Scott analyses areas of social life that are constituted in gendered terms, and shows how certain words or social debates have gendered connotations. She considers it of vital importance to study "not only what is at stake in proclamations or debates that invoke gender to explain or justify their positions but also how implicit understandings of gender are being invoked and reinscribed."⁶ Scott also encourages scholars to look at "man" and "woman" as empty and overflowing categories that are situated in specific contexts of time and place.⁷

Additionally, following recent feminist theorists like Ann Fausto-Sterling, I would like to problematize the dichotomies sex/gender and male/female. In 2000, Fausto-Sterling explained that the sex/gender divide appeared to be very clear in the 1970s in texts of sexologists like John Money and Anke Ehrhardt and feminist writings and activism, "*sex* represented the body's anatomy and physiological workings and *gender* represented social

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 1070.

⁶ Ibid., 1074.

⁷ Ibid.

forces that molded that behavior.”⁸ Accordingly, feminist activism used to center on what was understood as gender. For Fausto-Sterling, however, sex is not a purely physical category. She argues that our bodies are “too complex to provide clear cut answers about sexual difference.”⁹ Fausto-Sterling further argues that the sex/gender dichotomy limits feminist analysis in the sense that it excludes the active role of biology and science in the construction of gender, as well as the reciprocal nature of this process.¹⁰ Additionally, following the work of Judith Butler, Fausto-Sterling argues that western philosophical concepts are also gendered. Fausto-Sterling explains, relying on Butler, that our “viewpoints about sex and sexuality are already embedded in our philosophical concepts of how matter forms into bodies, the matter of bodies cannot form a neutral, pre-existing ground from which to understand the origins of sexual difference.”¹¹ The artificiality of the sex/gender dichotomy becomes clearer as we explore the constructed nature of the male/female opposition. Fausto-Sterling, among other feminist scholars, points that to name someone a man or a woman is a social decision. Fausto-Sterling provides the examples of intersexual bodies that “do not fall naturally into a binary classification.”¹² But when faced with sexual ambiguity, doctors usually choose to assign one sex, because apparently “there *ought* to be only two boxes: male and female.”¹³ Fausto-Sterling explains “[w]e may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision, but only our beliefs about gender –not science–can define our sex.”¹⁴ Transsexual people also challenge these seemingly clear-cut body

⁸ Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body. Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (Basic Books, 2000), 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

dichotomies. Thus, the sex/gender dichotomy obscures that science has an important role in the definition of gender. Likewise, the male/female dichotomy does not correspond to the varied bodies found in humans and their decisions over life but it has been actively constructed by medical sciences because of the culturally held beliefs that there ought to be only two sexes. This reflection on questioning the dichotomies sex/gender and male/female is important in this research because in the arguments on sex education there were scientific ideas about the differentiation of men and women and also arguments that presented these differences as “natural”. In both cases I will analyze them as social constructions and explore what functions they served and what were the social consequences of framing sexual difference in that way.

1.1.2. Foucault’s notions of discourse, sexuality and biopolitics

The work of Michel Foucault revolutionized the history of sexuality and conceptualizations of power in western academia. A key concept in Foucault’s work is that of discourse. Discourse, Scott explains “is not a language or a text but a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs.”¹⁵ This historically and contextually specific set of meanings is not fixed but is the site of conflict and its definition involves power relations. Areas of knowledge, their institutions and the particular social relations they create (e.g. medicine, the hospital, and the doctor/patient relationship), or in Foucault’s words discursive ‘fields of force,’ compete in the definition of

¹⁵ Joan W. Scott, ‘Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism’, *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 35. Scott defines language as a “meaning-constituting system.” That is any system verbal or not through which meaning is constructed and people use to understand and represent the world and to relate to others. *Ibid.*, 34.

meanings supporting their claims to (scientific) knowledge.¹⁶ In consideration of the above, Scott argues, discourse is “contained or expressed in organizations and institutions as well as in words; [and] all of these constitute texts or documents to be read.”¹⁷ Different discursive fields compete in the legitimation of “truths.” These “truths” are presented as self-evident or discovered through scientific research, acquiring the status of uncontested or objective knowledge, which helps to legitimize certain power relations.¹⁸ Hence, the creation of expert knowledge and the dissemination of discourses is connected to the exercise of power. In this sense, historian Susan Kent, explains: “Scientists, educators, physicians, psychologist and the institutions within which they worked created knowledge [...]. In so doing, they created and wielded power.”¹⁹

Foucault studied how sexuality has been present in occidental societies not just in the private lives of people but as part of the organization of power in society. Foucault argues that the rise of bourgeois or industrial societies was not simply accompanied by a repression of sex, but by new ways to think about sexuality and especially to talk about it producing a variety of discourses that aimed more than simply repressing sexuality to direct and administer it.²⁰ Since the 18th century, there was a tendency to study sex from a political, economic and technical perspective linked to concerns about the population. With the study of the population it became important to study facts such as: the birthrate, the age of marriage, legitimate and illegitimate births, the frequency of sexual relations and the ways to prevent

¹⁶ Scott, ‘Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference’, 35.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 35–6.

¹⁹ Kent, ‘The Road to “Gender”’, 62.

²⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction*, 17–25.

or promote fertility, the consequences of celibacy, etcetera. The rise of population issues created a link between the sexual behavior of individual citizens and the nation.²¹

A multiplicity of discourses about sexuality proliferated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in areas such as medicine, psychiatry and penal justice.²² Through them “legal sanctions were carefully described; pedagogical controls and medical treatments were organized.”²³ These discourses were part of the development of the modern state that aimed at regulating the lives of individuals, which Foucault has termed “biopower”. Foucault identified an old understanding of power grounded with the monarchy and based on the law, in which the sovereign could preside over the life and death of his subjects. Foucault refers to this understanding of power as “juridico-discursive.”²⁴ This kind of power transited to a different organization of power whose objective was the management of life through the administration of bodies, or biopolitics. It emerged in two separated processes that complemented each other. The first was initiated in the seventeenth century and centered on the body as a machine. It intended to optimize the body’ capabilities through disciplining, which would increase at the same time its usefulness and docility.²⁵ Through discipline, the body was integrated into systems of economic efficiency, as exemplified by schools and military institutions. Foucault refers to these systems as *anatomo-politics*.²⁶ The second process that emerged around the middle of the eighteenth century focused on the species’ body and its biological processes, like “propagation, births and mortality, level of health and

²¹ Ibid., 25–6.

²² Ibid., 30–3.

²³ Ibid., 36.

²⁴ Ibid., 81–91.

²⁵ Ibid., 139.

²⁶ Ibid., 139–40.

life expectancy.”²⁷ It rested on regulatory controls that constituted *a biopolitics of the population*.²⁸ These two trends composed what Foucault refers to as “the entry of life into history,” that is “the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the spheres of political techniques.”²⁹ This new focus on the “body” and “population” put sex in the centre of “a power organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death.”³⁰ Sexuality became an object of study, an important element in the development of individuality, and the target of political and economic interventions.³¹ Sexuality became linked to themes “of health, progeny, race, the future of the species, [and] the vitality of the social body.”³² It became important to analyse “the modes of sexual conduct, their determinations and their effects, at the boundary line of the biologic and economic domains.”³³ The sexual conduct of heterosexual couples was linked to political and economic purposes and new campaigns were implemented to manage it. It was through discourses that the state aimed at making individuals responsible for controlling their own sexuality.³⁴ In sum, biopolitics, Foucault suggests, emerged as a more pervasive kind of power that went beyond coercion or repression. It was a change from a negative to a positive way of power. It became more important to direct the lives of individuals into ideal behaviours than to punish them. In this process sexuality was constructed as of central feature. Through a web of discourses certain conducts were

²⁷ Ibid., 139.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 141–2.

³⁰ Ibid., 147.

³¹ Ibid., 146.

³² Ibid., 147.

³³ Ibid., 26.

³⁴ Ibid.

constructed as “ideal”, or “normal”, and others as “deviant.” These discourses aimed as well at making individuals responsible for acting according to them.

1.1.3. Biopolitics and sex education

Sex education can be understood as part of what Foucault names the “discursive explosion” about sexuality.³⁵ It was part of the state’s concern to teach its citizens how to conduct their sexuality. Campaigns on proper behaviour were specifically directed at children and teenagers, who were viewed as future citizens.³⁶ This interest in children was reflected since the end of the eighteenth century by an emergence of literature centred on students’ sexuality in Europe.³⁷

Exemplifying this trend of the proliferation of discourses on sexuality directed to students, Foucault narrates what may be one of the first experiments of sex education. As part of the German “philanthropic” movement, Basedow organized an event, a kind of examination and festival, in the Philanthropinum in May of 1776 in which the (male) students were to show their knowledge of the sex education they had received. Foucault terms this event as “the first solemn communion of adolescent sex and reasonable discourse.”³⁸ He continues as follows:

Before the assembled public, one of the professors, a certain Wolke, asked the students selected questions concerning the mysteries of sex, birth and procreation. He

³⁵ Ibid., 18.

³⁶ Sexuality was also displayed in the administration of education prior to the introduction of sex education. Foucault observes in the organization of secondary schools in the eighteenth century sexuality was present in issues such as the “architectural layout, the rules of discipline, and their whole internal organization.” Ibid., 27.

³⁷ Ibid., 28.

³⁸ Ibid., 29.

had them comment on engravings that depicted a pregnant woman, a couple and a cradle. The replies were enlightened, offered without shame or embarrassment. No unseemly laughter intervened to disturb them – except from the very ranks of an adult population more childish than the children themselves, and whom Wolke severely reprimanded.³⁹

Children were not supposed to be the passive objects of scientific discourses about sex. It was considered that “a certain reasonable, limited, canonical, and truthful discourse on sex was prescribed for him [the child] – a kind of discursive orthopaedics.”⁴⁰

However it is important to notice that discourses about sexuality were often not the same for men and women and the ideal behaviours that were promoted had a gendered content. To understand the relationship between gender and power. Sociologist R. W. Connell shows how the transformation of the state between the eighteenth century absolutist states to the twentieth century liberal-constitutional ones was accompanied by a change of ideals surrounding masculinity. Connell argued the capacity of violence and aggression was displaced in the nineteenth century by rationality, calculation and orderliness.⁴¹ Connell argued this change in gender “was not a *consequence* of the bourgeois revolution, it was a central part of it, part of the dynamic that created modern industrial capitalism as an already-gendered social order.”⁴² Thus, Connell, like Scott, sees the relationship between the gender and the state as mutually constitutive. On the one hand, the state “is constructed within gender

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ R. W. Connell, ‘The State, Gender and Sexual Politics: Theory and Appraisal’, in *Power/gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, ed. H. Lorraine Radtke and Henderkus J. Stam (London: Sage, 1994), 149–50.

⁴² Connell explains that changes in the organization of gender in society happen in a society that is already organized in a gendered way. Ibid., 150.

relations as the central institutionalization of gendered power.” On the other hand, Connell observes that “gender dynamics are a mayor force constructing the state, both in the historical creation of state structures and in contemporary politics.”⁴³

Nevertheless, understanding power within a Foucauldian perspective means that it operates not only through the state but also in a more diffuse and decentred way through the production of discourses.⁴⁴ In this process discourses “favor certain groups of people over other groups and they make these inequalities seem right and natural.”⁴⁵ As Scott observed, gender “is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.”⁴⁶ Thus, gender is a central domain through which those inequalities are organized.⁴⁷

The process of the proliferation of discourses about sexuality and its connection with medical, psychiatric, pedagogical and legal practices was all part of the emergence of biopolitics, as a new form of governance over the life of individuals. These discourses on sexuality were a motivating force for the implementation of sex education at the end of the nineteenth and especially during twentieth century. Sex education was a means in the dissemination of discourses on the ideal behaviours regarding sexuality. And these discourses served to legitimize social realities in terms of gender and sexuality.

⁴³ Ibid., 148.

⁴⁴ Kent, ‘The Road to “Gender”’, 62.

⁴⁵ Susan Kingsley Kent, ‘Theorizing Gender and Power’, in *Gender and History* (China: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 80.

⁴⁶ Scott, ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, 1067.

⁴⁷ Although Scott recognized that gender was not “the *only* field on which or through which power is represented or articulated.” Being class and race, but not only, important ones. Kent, ‘The Road to “Gender”’, 64.

1.1.4. Constructivist approach in the history of science

I would like to relate the challenges in the sex/gender dichotomy, as well as early-twentieth-century ideas of children's sexuality and eugenics,⁴⁸ with the recent contributions in the history of science that challenge strongly held notions—such as objectivity—that implied that the world could be known and represented in a transparent and straightforward way in which the preferences or intentions of the observer did not change the results.⁴⁹ Differing from this view, the constructivist approach on the history of science views science as a highly social activity that “is not sealed off from the values of the society in which it is practiced.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, as historian Nancy L. Stepan and others argue, science can be seen as “a productive force, generating knowledge and practices that shape the world in which we live.”⁵¹ Consequently, science stands as a culturally and contextually specific practice, eliminating the traditional distinction between scientific and social thought.⁵² For this thesis, this approach on the history of science means that scientific discourses—including those on human sexuality, eugenics and sexual difference—that were involved in the promotion of sex education will not be taken as “truths” but will be questioned in terms of what they

⁴⁸ In Chapter 2. Section 2.2.1., I review early-twentieth-century ideas of children's sexuality and eugenics.

⁴⁹ Mark Oromaner, 'Michael Mulkay - Science and the Sociology of Knowledge', *Social Forces* 59, no. 1 (September 1980): 303–5.

⁵⁰ Nancy L. Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics': Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 9. Authors like Fausto-Sterling and Martin also make this point from a gender perspective demonstrating how scientific knowledge actually reinforces gender views that are culturally grounded in the contexts where this knowledge is produced. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*; Emily Martin, 'The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male- Female Roles', *Signs* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1991): 485–501.

⁵¹ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics': Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 11. Fausto Sterling also makes the point about the reciprocal nature of social values influencing the science that is produced and how this scientific knowledge in turn actively shapes our material reality. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*.

⁵² Oromaner, 'Michael Mulkay - Science and the Sociology of Knowledge', 304. By the distinction between scientific and social thought here I refer to the separation between “natural” and “social” sciences.

implied in terms of social consequences for matters of gender and sexuality, and will be assumed to be contextually specific.

1.2. Methodology

1.2.1. Sources

In this section I will first describe my sources and then I will explain content analysis, or textual analysis, as my main research method. I will analyse a cluster of primary sources that I obtained from several archives in Mexico.⁵³ These materials include newspaper articles from the pro-government *El Nacional* and the conservative *Excélsior* from 1933 and 1934. These articles will provide a sample of the arguments for and against sex education that were expressed in the media. I will also analyse a booklet published in 1934 by the Ministry of Education, or SEP, which contains a collection of editorials, sixteen in favour and seven against sex education that appeared in different newspapers in 1933 and that SEP considered as the most representative of the debate.⁵⁴ For the arguments in favour of sex education I will also examine some articles in the monthly publication of the National Medicine Academy, or ANM: *Gaceta Medica* (Medical Gazette); the book *La educación sexual en la escuela Mexicana. Libro para los padres y los maestros* (Sex education in Mexican schools. Book for parents and teachers) written by physician Juan L. Soto and teacher A. Pérez y Soto that

⁵³ In Mexico City I visited the Archivo General de la Nación or AGN, the Hemeroteca Nacional de México or HNM and the Archivo Histórico de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, or AHUNAM. In Guadalajara I visited the historical archives in the Biblioteca Pública del Estado de Jalisco or BPEJ. I also obtained some materials from the online site of the Hemeroteca Digital Nacional de México or HNDM.

⁵⁴ It also included the conclusions of the SEP's Advisory Technical Commission and some declarations of Minister Bassols, which also appeared in the newspaper *El Nacional*. Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*. I found this booklet in the Library Jorge Carpizo in the Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, UNAM.

was published in 1933; and some lectures by the Eugenic Mexican Society for the improvement of Race, or SEM, that were published in a booklet, *Eugenesía y medicina social* (Eugenics and social medicine), in 1934 by Alfredo M. Saavedra. For arguments against sex education I will study letters send to Mexican president Abelardo L. Rodríguez found in National General archive, or AGN, as well as leaflets and letters related to the National Parent's Union, or UNPF, and National Association for the Freedom of Teaching, or ANPLE, preserved in AHUNAM.⁵⁵ I believe all the above mentioned sources can allow me to explore the development of the sex education initiative and the arguments that different social actors employed in the debates.

I would like to signal some limitations of this research related to the sources. First, even though I looked for women's contributions for or against sex education, most of my sources were written by men. Nonetheless, some newspaper articles published editorials written by women, including an interview with a woman physician in favour of sex education. Also letters to the president to revoke sex education were in its majority written by women.⁵⁶ Second, most of the sources were published in Mexico City and although the newspapers had a national character, the use of these sources will favour a centralist perspective. Third, during my research in the summer of 2015 and in January 2016 the archives of the SEP were not available for consultation, therefore materials in that important archive will not be considered.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ In particular in the Fondo Histórico Palomar y Vizcarra or FHPYV, that contains different documents of the Catholic opposition in post-revolutionary México.

⁵⁶ Other manifestations of women on issues of sexuality but that occurred before the 1932-1934 debate over sex education are included in in Chapter 3 section 3.3, and on Chapter 4 section 4.2.

⁵⁷ The SEP archive is in process of re-classification after being adopted by the National General Archive or AGN. Researchers can review boxes in the AGN but they lack a clear classification. I was able to review some twenty boxes randomly but I found nothing on the topic of sex education. Conscious of this limitation I just

1.2.2. Textual or content analysis

I will review these sources paying special attention to the construction of gender and sexuality in the debates of sex education in the 1930s. I will use textual analysis, or content analysis as it is also referred to, as my main research method. Social scientist Lindsay Prior explains that content analysis is often associated with quantitative research, and although the line that divides quantitative from qualitative research is rather blurred, Prior advocates for a qualitative type of content analysis, which is the model I will follow in this thesis.⁵⁸ Prior argues content analysis can be used in almost all kinds of research that include the analysis of textual data, images or videos.⁵⁹ Prior explains that content analysis can be employed in a variety of ways, including as its own independent method or combined with other research methods. From the four examples that Prior provides—the analysis of a group of interviews; a group of policy documents; a single interview or case study; and tracking the biography of a concept—the latter is the most useful model for this research.⁶⁰ Tracing the biography of a concept aims at exploring what is the meaning of a specific concept in a discipline or particular context and time. Prior observes that this technique facilitates the ability to identify the tensions in the definition of a concept and to situate it within larger frames of discourses.⁶¹

would like to add that the three authors reviewed in Chapter 2, section 2.1.3, who have written about sex education in Mexico in the 1930s use newspapers and periodical publications as their primary sources. And Vaughan who mentions the initiative, but does not focus especially on it and who had access to the SEP archive only refers to the mentioned collection of newspapers published by the SEP. See: Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (University of Arizona Press, 1997), 33–4.

⁵⁸ Lindsay Prior, 'Content Analysis', in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Patricia Leavy, Oxford Library of Psychology (Oxford - New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 360.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 363.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 373–4.

Given that my research question is how were gender and sexuality constructed by different actors in the debates about sex education, content analysis can help me trace the meanings that different actors gave to gender and sexuality. Some questions that I ask to search this information are: How was sexual difference or the male/female dichotomy being constructed in these debates? What was the meaning given to social categories such as “men,” “women,” “boys,” and “girls”? What were the ideal and deviant forms of sexuality for men and women? Methodologically, tracing the biography of a concept implies that a researcher selects sections of documents and conducts content analysis on the chosen portions.⁶² This is consistent with what I did for this research: I went to the archives, searching especially for documents that were related to the 1932-1934 sex education initiative in Mexico and then I further separated those documents and sections of documents into sources that dealt explicitly with gender and sexuality, which serve as the base for the analytical chapters (6 and 7) of this thesis.

Monique Hennink et al., refer to this method of research as textual analysis, and see it as a particularly conducive method for qualitative research when dealing with a large volume of data that very likely contains a tangle of issues.⁶³ In their view textual analysis can provide “a broader social understanding of the social phenomenon studied.”⁶⁴ They suggest identifying significant words, which they refer as codes, which can help the researchers to explore the sources in relation to their research questions. For this research, words like “boys,” “girls,” “innocence,” “morality,” “modesty,” “sexuality,” “corruption,”

⁶² Ibid., 373.

⁶³ Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter, and Ajay Bailey, ‘Textual Data Analysis’, in *Qualitative Research Methods* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 234.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

“motherhood,” “venereal diseases,” “sexual deviation,” “eugenics,” and “prostitution,” among others, were important to identify relevant information to my research questions. Hennink et al., explain four tasks that are often used when doing textual analysis: description, comparison, categorization and conceptualization, and theory development. To do textual analysis you do not necessarily need to use all the tasks and they can be applied in a variety of ways depending on your project.⁶⁵ I will explain the first three tasks as related to this research. According to Hennink et al., description “forms the foundation of qualitative data analysis and provides the rich detail that is sought in qualitative research.”⁶⁶ It can be used to “develop powerful and engaging accounts of events, processes, or social phenomena.”⁶⁷ Textual analysis usually involves making a “thick description,” a term developed by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, which “involves not only describing a particular behaviour but also the context within which that behaviour occurs.”⁶⁸ Due to the importance of the sociohistorical context to understanding the meanings given to gender and sexuality in this thesis, Chapter 3 provides the social and political context of Mexico in the early twentieth century, Chapter 4 the precedents to sex education and Chapter 5 the chronology of the conflict over the implementation of sex education in the 1930s. In this way the later analysis of gender and sexuality can be understood as part of the social and cultural meanings of this specific time and period and not as isolated texts or concepts.

A thick description also helps to find patterns in the data and how certain concepts appear to be related,⁶⁹ which lead us to the second task: comparison. Comparison can be used

⁶⁵ Ibid., 234–5.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 238.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 240.

regarding a code, for example “women,” to observe how of it was defined by different groups.⁷⁰ Categorizing and conceptualization, the third task, implies finding “codes with similar characteristics and grouping these together into meaningful categories,” and exploring “the relationships between these categories, to view data as a whole and develop conceptual understanding of the issues”, respectively.⁷¹ For this thesis a category can be the ideal conceptualizations of women or men in society, and then observe which topics where related to them and in which way. Conceptualizing can be done in a variety of ways, and the idea is to understand the data as a whole through integrating the diversity of the findings.⁷²

1.3. Conclusion

I will use this theoretical and methodological framework to answer my research question: How were gender and sexuality constructed by different actors in the debates about sex education? I consider that in Mexico in the 1930s different actors used the occasion of the first sex education initiative to publicize their views about gender and sexuality. The concept of gender developed by Scott will help me explore the symbols and norms that tried to redefine ideal behaviours for men and women. Also approaching “men” and “women” as empty and overflowing categories, following Scott’s example, and questioning the sex/gender and male/female dichotomy, as suggested by Fausto-Sterling, can help me to explore how sexual difference was being constructed within the debates about sex education. Viewing sexuality as a historical practice will allow me observe how sexuality was

⁷⁰ Ibid., 243–4.

⁷¹ Ibid., 245.

⁷² Ibid., 245–56.

understood by different social actors and if sexuality was differently conceptualized for men and women and which were the “ideal” and “deviant” forms of sexuality. Also looking at the state as a chief actor in the delineation of policies that aimed at the management of the lives of its citizens can help to make evident the gendered nature of the state, as articulated by Connell, as well as fact that the state also actively produces gender, as is argued by both Connell and Scott. Furthermore, looking at power from a Foucauldian perspective can help to visualize how other actors, such as physicians and religious organizations, also exercised power through the elaboration and dissemination of discourses. I will also focus specifically on the participation of women both in the promotion and opposition regarding sex education and on the arguments that they used to defend their standpoints.

Chapter 2. Literature review

This chapter discusses literature relevant to my research. It is divided in two parts. The first part focuses on the historiography of sex education and has three subsections. The first one discusses the history of sex education, which was a transnational phenomenon¹ at the beginning of the twentieth century. It also presents challenges and more common approaches in the existing scholarship of the history of sex education. In the second subsection I analyse three studies on sex education at the beginning of the twentieth century in France, Spain, and Uruguay to observe how sex education has been studied and what characteristics it had in each context. In the third subsection I critically review what has been written on the 1930's Mexican experience with sex education. In the second part of this chapter, I develop ideas that were important for advocates and opponents of sex education and which had an international character. Although these ideas travelled across nations they were not simply reproduced in the new location, therefore it is important to observe how they were adapted in each context. The first section discusses eugenics and theories on children's sexuality that informed campaigns in favour of sex education. In the second section I present ideas that were expressed and disseminated by the Catholic Church that were important in the resistance against sex education. I will conclude by showing how my research will contribute to the existing literature.

¹ For transnational I mean the movement of peoples, ideas, technologies and institutions across national boundaries. Although I think sex education could be studied as a transnational phenomena, this study focus on Mexico and provides other three national examples of historiography on the topic. For a brief history of the term transnational history see: Ian Tyrrell, 'What Is Transnational History?', *Ian Tyrrell*, January 2007, <https://iantyrrell.wordpress.com/what-is-transnational-history/>. This blog entry is an excerpt from a paper given at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociale, Paris, by the author.

2.1. Historiography on sex education

2.1.1. Recent historiography on sex education, approaches and challenges

The first half of the twentieth century saw debates over the introduction of sex education in schools and the implementation of the first projects in Europe, the United States and Latin America. However, sex education has not been until very recently the object of historical research.² Some authors agree that the history of sex education is still an unexplored arena, with many countries and aspects of the subject still unexplored.³ Hall observes that sex education has been “relatively neglected” by social historians. She attributes this to the liminality of the subject, in which many disciplinary areas intersect. The history of sex

² Some examples of historiography on sex education are, for Europe: Lutz D. H. Sauerteig and Roger Davidson, eds., *Shaping Sexual Knowledge: A Cultural History of Sex Education in Twentieth Century Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Virginie De Lucca Barrusse and Anne-Françoise Praz, ‘The Emergence of Sex Education: A Franco-Swiss Comparison, 1900-1930’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24, no. 1 (January 2015): 46–74; Belén Jiménez-Alonso, ‘Eugenics, Sexual Pedagogy and Social Change: Constructing the Responsible Subject of Governmentality in the Spanish Second Republic’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 39, no. 2 (2008): 249–54. For the United States: Jeffrey P Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Sapping of Adolescence in the 20th Century* (Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). For Latin America, in Uruguay: Silvana Darré Otero, ‘Cuando El Saber No Tiene Lugar: La Difícil Implementación de La Educación Sexual En El Sistema Uruguayo’, in *Estudios Sobre Sexualidades En América Latina*, ed. Kathya Araujo and Mercedes Prieto (Ecuador: FLACSO, 2008), 199–213. There are also articles and primary sources that show how sex education was being promoted in other Latin American countries at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Argentina there were promoters of sex education like Raquel Cañama a socialist teacher and militant of the eugenic movement. Other example was Doctor F. Garzón Maceda who advocated sex education framing his argument in eugenic ideas. See respectively: Lucia Lionetti, ‘La Educación de Las Mujeres En América Latina: Formadoras de Ciudadanos’, in *Historia de Las Mujeres En España Y América Latina. Volumen III: Del Siglo XIX a Los Umbrales Del XX*, Madrid (Cátedra, 2006), 856; F. Garzón Maceda, ‘Eugenesia, Puericultura Y Educación Sexual’, *Revista de La Universidad Nacional de Córdoba*, June 1925. Also, feminists who participated in the First Pan American Congress in 1916 in Argentina argued in favour of the inclusion of sex education in schools. Donna Guy, ‘The Politics of Pan-American Cooperation: Maternalist Feminism and the Child Rights Movement’, in *Feminisms and Internationalism*, ed. Mrinalini Sinha, Donna Guy, and Angela Woollacott (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 110. In Brazil sex education was a topic of discussion in the First Brazilian Eugenics Congress in July 1929. This congress was attended by delegates from Argentina, Peru, Chile and Paraguay. Stepan, ‘*The Hour of Eugenics*’: *Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 53–4.

³ Lutz Sauerteig and Roger Davidson, ‘Shaping the Sexual Knowledge of the Young: Introduction’, in *Shaping Sexual Knowledge. A Cultural History of Sex Education in Twentieth Century Europe*, ed. Lutz Sauerteig and Roger Davidson (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 10–1; De Lucca Barrusse and Praz, ‘The Emergence of Sex Education: A Franco-Swiss Comparison, 1900-1930’, 49.

education is relevant for subjects like the history of childhood, education and pedagogy, medicine and health, gender, and social and state policy.⁴ Another reason could be that subject has been (and continues to be) in almost every place an issue of debate and, as Sauerteig and Davidson observe in the European context, variables in the timing and results of sex education programs were strongly influenced in each country by power relations between “the ‘public’ and private’ sphere, between the rights of parents to educate their children themselves and the public task of the state to preserve and control the health of its citizenry, and [...] between the forces of past traditions and the visions of the future.”⁵ The different appropriations of sex education in European countries is an example of how transnational ideas about sex education were reassembled in a different way in different contexts.⁶

Sauerteig and Davidson observe that recent contributions to the history of sex education in Europe have followed four major approaches. The first approach focuses on the history of sex education policy, regarding it as an area of contest, paying special attention to the actors involved in the debates such as parents, educators, medical professionals, purity activists, churches and women’s organizations. The second approach, influenced by the works of Foucault, has studied sexual education “as part of a web of discourses that has constructed and regulated sexuality in modern society,” focusing on the construction “of sexual norms and deviances and the proscription of ‘dangerous sexualities.’”⁷ A third branch

⁴ Lesley A. Hall, ‘In Ignorance and Knowledge: Reflections in the History of Sex Education in Britain’, in *Shaping Sexual Knowledge. A Cultural History of Sex Education in Twentieth Century Europe*, ed. Lutz Sauerteig and Roger Davidson (New York: Routledge, 2009), 19.

⁵ Sauerteig and Davidson, ‘Shaping the Sexual Knowledge of the Young: Introduction’, 6.

⁶ De Lucca Barrusse and Praz, ‘The Emergence of Sex Education: A Franco-Swiss Comparison, 1900-1930’, 49.

⁷ Sauerteig and Davidson, ‘Shaping the Sexual Knowledge of the Young: Introduction’, 5.

by feminist scholars which also focuses on discourses sees “the process of sexual enlightenment, and the adoption and internalization of ‘appropriate’ sexual conducts [...] as fundamentally gendered.”⁸ This approach pays attention to the content of sex education, asking whether it was the same or not for boys and girls, and whether it tended to reinforce double moral standards or, on the contrary, led to greater sexual equality. Studies in this line have observed how sex education has often defined sex for girls “as an experience confined to marriage and procreation and with an enduring focus on the impact of female promiscuity on public health and morality,” and is thereby contributing to “the evolving social control of female sexuality and sexual behavior.”⁹ The fourth approach has concentrated on redefinitions of the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ sphere produced by the state’s involvement in sexual education policies.¹⁰ I will use these four strands in the study of sex education to analyse recent historiography on the subject in this chapter and as guidelines for my own research.

2.1.2. Sex education in early twentieth century, the examples of France, Spain and Uruguay

In this section I will critically review the study of sex education in France made by Virginie De Luca Barrusse and Anne-Françoise Praz; the study of sexual pedagogy and eugenics in Spain by Bélen Jiménez-Alonso; and Silvana Darré Otero’s study of the implementation of sex education in the educative system of Uruguay.¹¹ I chose France and Spain because of the long-standing tradition of knowledge exchange that existed between these countries and

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 5–6.

¹¹ De Lucca Barrusse and Praz, ‘The Emergence of Sex Education: A Franco-Swiss Comparison, 1900-1930’; Jiménez-Alonso, ‘Eugenics, Sexual Pedagogy and Social Change’; Darré Otero, ‘Cuando El Saber No Tiene Lugar’.

Mexico. I selected Darré's study because to my knowledge it is the only study on sex education in Latin America and in this sense it can offer an approach from the same region.¹² In some cases when I considered it necessary I added extra information about the development of sex education in these countries, to complement what is included in these studies.

De Lucca Barrusse and Praz present important information about sex education in France from 1890 to 1930. In the period from 1890 to 1915 they found that the first and more prominent actors mobilizing in favour of sex education were doctors. A leading figure was Alfred Fournier who in 1901 founded the French Society for Health and Moral Prophylaxis or SPSM.¹³ SPSM efforts were driven by concerns about venereal disease and what was perceived as the decrease in the reproduction of the bourgeoisie in France. Venereal disease at this time was thought to be hereditary and for this reason French doctors "feared that it would become a 'gangrene' on the 'race.'" ¹⁴ SPSM delegates believed "that the bourgeoisie needed to be encouraged to produce healthy children, while high birth-rates among the working-class fueled fears about the spread of alcoholism and tuberculosis."¹⁵ The sex education that SPSM members promoted consisted "above all of sexual dissuasion" before marriage.¹⁶ There was special reluctance to mention sexuality or the risk of venereal diseases to girls. However, the French doctors' advocacy to implement sex education was faced with

¹² As mentioned in note 1, there is evidence from primary sources or from studies that focus on education, health policies or eugenics that sex education was being promoted in countries like Argentina and Brazil during the first decades of the twentieth century but there are not studies that especially focus on sex education.

¹³ In French, Société française de prophylaxie sanitaire et morale. De Lucca Barrusse and Praz, 'The Emergence of Sex Education: A Franco-Swiss Comparison, 1900-1930', 50.

¹⁴ Ibid., 53.

¹⁵ Ibid., 52.

¹⁶ Ibid., 51.

outrage from Catholic groups.¹⁷ A minority of physicians in France discussed sex education from a neo-Malthusian perspective, with the purpose of controlling fertility.¹⁸ They published some successful brochures that dealt with contraception methods, for example Jean Marestan's *L'éducation sexuelle* (1910).¹⁹ In this period, De Lucca Barrusse and Praz argue, sex education promoters had little success in convincing governments to implement their agenda. Two reasons explain this development. First, the “absence of cooperation between the medical and educational administrators.”²⁰ Second, sex education was as a highly political issue that created a clash “between Catholics concerned about church prerogatives and the maintenance of religious schooling and republicans – Catholic or not – who advocated youth socialization run by experts and who thus ventured into territory traditionally governed by the church.”²¹

In the period from 1915 to 1930 in France, numerous actors mobilized to implement sex education. After World War I, there was an increase of syphilis and other venereal diseases, especially from returning soldiers. Sex education was seen as helping to prevent venereal diseases. The child specialist Adolpe Pinard argued that “The future of the race depends entirely, I daresay, on sex education.”²² In 1923, a group with close ties to the SPSM,

¹⁷ Ibid., 51–2.

¹⁸ Francis Ronsin in her study of neo-Malthusians in France in early twentieth century shows that this movement that was in favour of the decline of the population growth and had a strong political content. Neo-Malthusians in this period believed that population growth only benefited capitalists that could pay low salaries to workers due to their abundance and to the states that could lead wars provided with the lives of young poor men. They were against pro-natality policies and believed that workers' families would benefit by the reduction of children through contraceptive measures. H el ene Bergues, ‘Ronsin Francis - La Gr eve de Ventres; Propagande Malthusienne et Baisse de La Natalit e En France, XIXe-XXe Si cles’, *Population* 36e ann ee, no. 1 (1981): 196–97.

¹⁹ De Lucca Barrusse and Praz, ‘The Emergence of Sex Education: A Franco-Swiss Comparison, 1900-1930’, 53.

²⁰ Ibid., 54.

²¹ Ibid., 55.

²² Ibid., 62.

the National Congress of Propaganda for Social Hygiene and Prophylactic Education,²³ carried out a survey among 20,000 education professionals, asking them: “Do you think schools should initiate young people in sexual issues?” A clear majority said “yes.”²⁴ The minority that opposed it regarded sex education as a prerogative of families. Another ally in the promotion of sex education was the Feminist Secular Schoolteachers’ Group,²⁵ which devoted their 1924 convention to the topic.²⁶ Some doctors also gave sex education lectures to young men, using their personal networks. In this period, the prevention of venereal disease, although present in sex education discourses, gave way to a strong importance to “instill[ing] the maternal instinct in girls,” as the SPSM concluded in its survey.²⁷ In 1924, the SPSM founded the Committee on Female Education directed by Dr. Germanine Montreuil-Straus, a prominent writer on books for future mothers.²⁸ The Committee’s objective was “setting up a system for educating girls, ‘above all a moral and scientific preparation for marriage and motherhood with a view to individual preservation and protection of the race.’”²⁹ This committee, made up exclusively of women, was particularly successful as they gave a series of lectures authorized by the Ministry of Public Education and subsidized by the Ministry of Social Hygiene, Assistance and Prevention.³⁰ The request by SPSM members to introduce sex education as a compulsory subject in public schools and the first lectures held on sex education produced an outcry from Catholic circles. Most Catholics believed that sexuality only belonged to the religious marriage, should be linked to

²³ In French, Congrès national d’hygiène sociale et d’éducation prophylactique.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 62–3.

²⁵ The Groupe féministe de l’enseignement laïc.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 63–4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

reproduction, and ought to remain a prerogative of the private sphere, as they feared that “even teaching the mechanics of reproduction implied that sex could be a nonreproductive act.”³¹ Parents’ associations were created to fight against school-based sex education. In their view this kind of instruction “went against the freedoms of the family and respect for religious convictions.”³² Catholic parents further dreaded that teachers would introduce neo-Malthusian ideas, i.e., contraception. The state in France sided with Catholic groups in this respect; it wanted to promote an increase in births, and in July 1930 passed a law that prohibited the sale of contraceptives and the diffusion of knowledge on the subject.³³ This context made it very unlikely that teachers would promote any neo-Malthusian ideas. Physicians tried to build consensus, highlighting that sex education would be always linked to moral education, but parents succeeded in their opposition to sex education becoming a compulsory subject in schools. Instead, a lecture on the subject was set up for students in tenth grade, who needed their parents’ authorization to attend it. The subject of school-based sex education was not discussed again in France until after World War II.³⁴

The study of De Lucca Barrusse and Praz focuses primarily on the actors involved and on the difficulties of the implementation of sex education, a focus they suggest can be useful for comparative studies. They also refer to important aspects to look at when analysing actors, for example, what their normative positions were about the objectives of sex education. Another example are the hidden agendas of individuals or groups entering the debate on sex education that go beyond “the stated goal of combating a hazard to health or morals,”³⁵ that

³¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

³² *Ibid.*, 64.

³³ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

sometimes led to unexpected coalitions. De Lucca Barrusse and Praz show how a contextualized study of the implementation of sex education focused on the actors can be meaningful. At the same time, they provide information about the content of sex education, and even if their study does not focus on gender, it is not gender blind either.

In Spain, Jiménez-Alonso shows how central sexual pedagogy was for physicians advocating eugenics in the early 1930s.³⁶ She studied the lectures presented at a eugenics congress in 1933, called the First Spanish Eugenic Days or PJEE.³⁷ In the early 1930s, during the Second Republic, the eugenic movement in Spain was at its peak.³⁸ Jiménez-Alonso frames her study on Foucault's notion of governmentality, which she understands as the promotion of "personal regulation regarding sexual conduct" that was advocated by most eugenicists in Spain.³⁹ Accordingly to Jiménez-Alonso, the eugenic movement in Spain aimed at rationalizing reproduction, which physicians interpreted as "making people responsible for their sexual actions and about setting aside Catholic sexual morality."⁴⁰ Jiménez-Alonso states that "eugenics in Spain was largely centred on *sexual pedagogy*."⁴¹ Proponents of eugenics wanted to change "*the role-relationship models* specifically regarding sexuality," meaning the way men and women behaved and related to each other.⁴² This was understood as a kind of "mental hygiene" that would contribute to "freeing people's instincts from dogmatic and religious prejudice."⁴³ Two figures, the modest woman and Don Juan (a

³⁶ Eugenics will be explained in this chapter section 2.2.1.

³⁷ In Spanish, Primeras Jornadas Eugénicas Españolas.

³⁸ Jiménez-Alonso, 'Eugenics, Sexual Pedagogy and Social Change', 247–8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.* Italics in the original.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 251. Italics in the original.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

womanizer) were analysed from a psychoanalytic perspective.⁴⁴ The modest woman was criticised for “hiding from everything in relation to sexuality” following the Catholic morals, whereas Don Juanism “was understood as a kind of *national neurosis*.”⁴⁵ Don Juan was also devoid of his masculine character and was understood as a feminized men who did not live up to the ideal of masculinity. Eugenists in Spain aimed at creating new models of masculinity and femininity and eradicating prostitution, but they did so within a conservative framework, reinforcing what was perceived as positive versions of traditional gender roles of men as hardworking breadwinners and women as educated mothers. In his paper for the PJEE in 1933, Professor of Penal Law Luis Jiménez de Asúa expressed the objectives of sex education in the following way: “Sexual education, conceived in its broadest meaning, teaches men the true virile ideal and women the authentic feminine aim, making men more masculine and women more feminine.”⁴⁶ The psychoanalyst Rodríguez Lafora held more open views about sex education as he supported friendly conversations with adolescents and was against repressive methods or the imposition of abstinence.⁴⁷

Jiménez-Alonso’s study makes clear how central sexual pedagogy was for eugenists in Spain in the 1930s. She emphasises how gender roles of men as breadwinners and women as educated mothers, and a sexuality freed from religious morality were promoted. However, she does not explore how eugenic discourses had an impact on the organization of society, e.g. how they influenced the law, or the layout of public policies in areas such as education

⁴⁴ The modest woman does not refer to a particular woman or character, but it is more a way to refer to modest women in general, which were considered to be too much under the influence of the Catholic Church’s morality, leading to dysfunctional sexual lives. Jiménez-Alonso uses the term “the modest woman” and that’s the reason I use it here.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 251. Italics in the original.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 251.

or health. It is possible that the triumph of Franco in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) truncated many of the Republican projects, including those of doctors advocating eugenics and sexual pedagogy.⁴⁸

Darré Otero studied sex education in the Uruguayan context. Sex education in Uruguay was promoted since the beginning of the twentieth century, but by the year 2008 school-based sex education was still not included in the educative system.⁴⁹ In her study Darré Otero focuses on sex education as an object of discourse, following the archaeological approach developed by Michel Foucault⁵⁰ and French theorist of institutional analysis Rene Lourdeau.⁵¹ Although Darré Otero explains that gender and gender policies are part of her analysis, in the text I did not encounter examples of this.⁵² In Uruguay, Darré observes, in the early twentieth century sex education appeared as an object of study at congresses of medicine and health. In this period, the objective of sex education was to explain the mechanics of reproduction in a truthful way and to prevent venereal diseases, particularly syphilis.⁵³ A leading figure in this period was the socialist and feminist, teacher and physician Paulina Luisi (1875-1949) who sympathized with eugenic ideas. Luisi was especially

⁴⁸ Although most advocates of eugenics in Spain were only in favour of positive measures like education, there were also physicians in favour of negative measures like sterilization. Dr. Saldaña was one of the proponents of negative eugenics, in his view sterilization should be based on “*racial responsibility*”. Accordingly to Jiménez-Alonso negative eugenics were never applied by Republicans but during the Fascist regime led by Franco negative eugenics were applied on Republicans, demonstrating that the “abuses of power” that some physicians feared actually came true. *Ibid.*, 252.

⁴⁹ Darré Otero, ‘Cuando El Saber No Tiene Lugar’, 200.

⁵⁰ Fairclough distinguishes between Foucault’s earlier archaeological work in which he focused “on types of discourse (‘discourse formation’) as rules for constituting areas of knowledge”, from Foucault’s later genealogical studies, where the emphasis “shifted to relationships between knowledge and power”. Norman Fairclough, ‘Michel Foucault and the Analysis of Discourse’, in *Discourse Analysis and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 39.

⁵¹ Darré Otero, ‘Cuando El Saber No Tiene Lugar’, 200–2.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 203.

interested in protecting the health of mothers and children. Her campaign for sex education was closely connected with the fight against prostitution and venereal diseases. She was against the system of double moral standards that in her view prostitution promoted.⁵⁴ For Luisi sex education was “a moral education, and one that demanded personal and social responsibility related to the practice of sexuality which should be equally shared by both sexes.”⁵⁵ Luisi already gained interest in sex education in 1913 when she travelled to Europe to learn about the latest developments on school hygiene, sex education and prophylaxis.⁵⁶ From 1925 to 1930 she gave a class on sex education at a Normal school in Uruguay. In 1930, this class was suppressed by a school inspector. In Luisi’s view sex education should serve to discipline the sexual instinct, and she was against theories that emphasized the satisfaction of the sexual instinct and pleasure.⁵⁷

In 1924, member of parliament A. Gallinal, proposed a law that would make sex education in public schools mandatory, but it was rejected.⁵⁸ After this failure, in Darré’s opinion, sex education decreased in the public interest. In the following years two projects were introduced that Darré sees as precedents for sex education, giving sex education a different orientation than in the 1920s. The first was Estable Plan, a model of education used in some schools from 1930 to 1970.⁵⁹ In this model “the core idea of sex education was the origin of life and the evolution of living creatures, their slogan was ‘spontaneous generation

⁵⁴ Asunción Lavrin, ‘Paulina Luisi: Pensamiento Y Escritura Feminista’, in *Estudios Sobre Escritoras Hispánicas En Honor de Georgina Sabat-Rivers*, ed. Lou Charnon-Deutsch (Madrid: Castalia, 1992), 166.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 168. My own translation.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 168–9.

⁵⁸ Darré Otero, ‘Cuando El Saber No Tiene Lugar’, 205.

⁵⁹ The Estable Plan, was inspired on the ideas of Professor Clemente Estable (1894-1976), who was also interested on biological research. The Estable plan introduced the methods of experimentation in science to the school program. *Ibid.*, 206.

does not exist.”⁶⁰ The Estable Plan was based on a naturalist model and took examples from the lives of flowers, ants and bees. In the second one, composed by the Programs for Rural (1949) and Urban Schools (1959) and applied from 1949 to 1970, sex education was understood as a form of hygiene and emphasized prevention of what was constructed as sexual deviations.⁶¹ This program was taught to students in fifth and sixth grade and focused on the reproduction of organisms or living creatures in general. The aim of this program was to form new habits in students based on hygiene principles, including a kind of sexual hygiene based on a psychiatric and medical model.⁶² Important in the debates about sex education in Uruguay has been the dispute between “two institutions of knowledge and power: medicine and the [Catholic] Church,”⁶³ both powerful institutions in the country. This is exemplified by the Catholic Church’s efficient opposition that impeded the institutionalization of sex education in schools until the year 2008, and by the fact that doctors (and not teachers) have been consolidated as the only legitimate actors in the transmission of sexual knowledge.⁶⁴

The examples of France, Spain and Uruguay exemplify how sex education was an international phenomenon at the beginning of the twentieth century. These diverse national experiences show parallels but also differences in the terms and results that these discourses produced in each place. For example, the French experience shared with the Mexican one a

⁶⁰ Ibid. This is somehow confusing in Darré’s text, because she talks about the principles of sex education and at the same time argues that sex education has not been implemented until 2008 in Uruguay. My own translation.

⁶¹ Darré does not give information about what were those “sexual deviations”, although it is very likely that it referred to masturbation and homosexuality.

⁶² Ibid., 207.

⁶³ Ibid., 204. My own translation.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 211.

strong opposition of parents' organizations against sex education, and all three experiences confirm the trend that doctors with eugenic positions were the most active actors to mobilize for sex education in the early twentieth century. The Spanish case illustrates how the links of doctors with the governing group gave them the ability to disseminate their discourses, although the influence that these discourses had in the private lives of people and in the laws and public policies is not explored. The Spanish case also demonstrates how doctors from a scientific perspective wanted to promote a new set of morality regarding gender roles and sexuality that could replace Catholic standards. This intention to create a new moral aside from the influence of the Church, I argue, was also present in the Mexican initiative. The Uruguayan case displays a strong resistance in the implementation of school-based sex education led by the Catholic Church, which may be representative of the influence that this institution has maintained over the creation of discourses that continue to shape desirable conducts of people.

2.1.3. Historiography on sex education in Mexico

In this section I will critically review four studies that dealt explicitly with the 1932-1934 sex education initiative in Mexico, stressing whether or not these works included gender and sexuality into their analysis.⁶⁵ These studies date from the 1970s to the early 2000s, and I will analyse them chronologically.

⁶⁵I chose these studies because I think these authors in one way or another took the initiative to introduce sex education as central to their analysis. Other works that mention the initiative are: Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 33–4; Stepan, *'The Hour of Eugenics': Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 58, 130. Mexican cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis also mentions the existence of the initiative and frames it as one episode of the confrontation between Catholic and secular views in the construction of the Mexican state. Monsiváis, *El Estado Laico Y Sus Malquerientes*, 123–131.

In his book about the years of Bassols as Minister of Education (1931-1934), published in Spanish in 1976 by the Ministry of Public Education or SEP,⁶⁶ John A. Britton was especially interested in the ideologies that influenced education in Mexico. He also studied the expansion of the educative system, the further secularization of education, and the programs of rural schools. In a chapter about the 1930s' sex education initiative, Britton focused especially on the connections between the conflicts produced by the secularization of public and private schools; conflicts among teachers' Unions and leaders with the Minister of Public Education and the protest against sex education that resulted in Bassols' resignation. His study stays on the political level of analysis, as traditionally understood, and does not focus on gender or sexuality issues or on the content of either the proposal or the protests against it. Nevertheless, Britton offers a very good analysis of the political context, the interactions of different groups that disagreed with Bassols, and important information about the development of the proposal.⁶⁷

In 1998 Anne Rubenstein published an article about a single protest by male students against the implementation of school-based sex education that took place in a fancy cinema in Mexico City on February 1934.⁶⁸ In Rubenstein's study, gender is of central importance; she notices how the changing roles of women in society were the cause of much of the anxieties that prompted the opposition to the introduction of sex education. She also observes how the students protested in ways that marked them as masculine, especially in their defense

⁶⁶ Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México I*. This book has a volume two in which Britton focused on the history of education in Mexico from 1934 to 1940, years in which education was officially called socialist. John A. Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México II. Los Años de Cárdenas 1934-1940*, SEP-Setentas 288 (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1976).

⁶⁷ John A. Britton, 'La Educación Sexual Y La Renuncia de Bassols', in *Educación Y Radicalismo En México I. Los Años de Bassols 1931-1934*, SEP-Setentas 287 (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1976), 97–116.

⁶⁸ Anne Rubenstein 'Raised Voices in the Cine Montecarlo: Sex Education, Mass Media and Oppositional Politics in Mexico', *Journal of Family History* 23, no. 3 (July 1998): 312–23.

of women's purity that they believed sex education would take away.⁶⁹ She studied this particular protest as part of the conservatives' discomfort with the modernization of cultural mores that was carried by both the state (through education and more job opportunities for women) and the media, and relates these protests to other manifestations of political opposition in Mexico.⁷⁰ However, Rubenstein's analysis does not say much about government's initiative on sex education, or the general content of the debates.⁷¹

Another work on the 1930s' sex education proposal is an article by Mexican historian Alberto Del Castillo from 2000, in which he explores the representations of childhood in it.⁷² According to Del Castillo, at the beginning of the 1930s there were two conceptions of childhood that were confronted during the debates about the implementation of sex education. The first was a view of childhood that introduced new notions of psychology and sexuality that emerged through pedagogical and medical (hygienist) discourses since the end of the nineteenth century, which was supported by government and intellectual circles. In this notion the well-being of children was linked to that of the nation.⁷³ The second view, held by a big majority of the Mexican society and influenced by Catholic views, constructed children as innocent and asexual. Del Castillo's study is particularly strong on the development of the opposition arguments. He gives voice to sectors of the middle-class, many of them Catholics, which felt marginalized by the government's interest in workers

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Maybe because of her emphasis on only one incident, Rubenstein presents some inaccuracies about the political context. One example is when she declares that Bassols lost his job as consequence of the election of Mexican new president Lazaro Cárdenas. However the news of Bassols' resignation was in all national media on May 10th, 1934, and this was before the presidential election. *Ibid.*, 315.

⁷² Alberto Del Castillo Troncoso, 'La Polémica En Torno a La Educación Sexual En La Ciudad de México Durante La Década de Los Años Treinta', *Estudios Sociológicos* XVIII, no. 1 (Enero-Abril 2000): 203–26.

⁷³ Del Castillo Troncoso, 'La Polémica En Torno a La Educación Sexual', 205, 210.

and peasants and its antireligious policies. Nevertheless, his analysis does not explore the gendered content of the debates or makes explicit the gender of the participants.⁷⁴

Mexican teacher and historian Belinda Arteaga wrote a book on the topic of sex education in the first half of the twentieth century published in 2002.⁷⁵ Even if the book's title suggest an emphasis on sex education, she develops a variety of topics and only one chapter deals directly with sex education.⁷⁶ Arteaga reviews processes that range from the intellectual precursors of the Mexican Revolution to sex education in the 1930's to the implementation of coeducation in public schools during president Cárdenas' administration (1934-1940). Arteaga's study is interesting because she connects educational policies with the promotion of gender equality and presents a variety of primary sources that focus on women.⁷⁷ Arteaga, who frames her analysis within the history of mentalities,⁷⁸ identifies three "ways of looking" or three mentalities in Mexican society: a conservative one, an eugenic and one that focused on coeducation as a way of transforming gender relations.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Del Castillo Troncoso, 'La Polémica En Torno a La Educación Sexual'. For example in page 217 he offers a quote from a letter that was written by a mother in one conservative newspaper, but he never introduces who is the author of this primary source.

⁷⁵ Belinda Arteaga, *A Gritos Y Sombrerazos. Historia de Los Debates Sobre La Educación Sexual En México 1906-1949* (México: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional / Miguel Angel Porrua, 2002). (Between shouts and hats' fights: history about debates on sex education in México 1906-1949).

⁷⁶ Belinda Arteaga, 'Narciso Bassols o La Derrota de La Educación Sexual', in *A Gritos y Sombrerazos. Historia de Los Debates Sobre La Educación Sexual En México 1906-1949* (México: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional / Miguel Angel Porrua, 2002), 85–120.

⁷⁷ For example in note 388 Arteaga presents the testimony of a woman identified as "an old teacher" that narrates how she "caught two female students doing immoral acts," which appeared in *La Prensa*, a conservative newspaper on January 18th, 1936 while coeducation was being debated. Arteaga, *A Gritos Y Sombrerazos. Historia de Los Debates Sobre La Educación Sexual En México 1906-1949*, 172. I think this source suggest that there may be other sources, including those in the SEP archives, that can help to historicize how sexualities that were constructed as deviant were dealt in education institutions. All quotes from sources in Spanish are my own translation unless otherwise specified.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Although it seems not very clear how these three represent different "mentalities" this is the way that Arteaga organizes her analyses. Ibid., 12–46. In the case of eugenics, even if Arteaga states it is one of three relevant "views" in her analysis, she does no contextualizes eugenics in Mexico. When she introduces eugenics she just describes it as a "supposedly scientific panacea" that wanted to create a new man and

Arteaga attributes the idea to introduce sex education exclusively to Minister Bassols, and she describes actors in a very black and white fashion.⁸⁰ She does not consider previous literature on sex education, for example Britton's book,⁸¹ and her analysis misses much of the political context in the early 1930s. Even if Arteaga states she is interested in women and gender issues, her analysis does not show this.⁸²

2.2. Sex education and early twentieth century diffusion of ideas

2.2.1. Children's sexuality and eugenics

Ideas about children's sexuality have changed over time. Drawing from the history of childhood, historians Sauerteig and Davidson present three different conceptions of children's sexuality. The first one corresponds to the period before the eighteenth century, it was thought that children were "naturally wicked and corrupted and that they required strict education, including flogging, to form them into moral human beings."⁸³ In this period, the

contributed to racism. Arteaga equalizes eugenics in Germany with those in the rest of the world and sees all eugenic policies as racist, misogynist and homophobic, but does not develop examples that support these claims. Ibid., 35–9, 55. Arteaga I think mistakenly attributes the foundation of the Mexican Eugenic Society or SEM to the recommendations of the Child Congress in Lima in 1930. Ibid., 90–1. In Chapter 4, I present a review of eugenics in Latin America and Mexico and the history of the SEM that I considered necessary to contextualize the 1932-1934 sex education initiative.

⁸⁰ For example, she portrays Bassols as an authoritarian Stalinist who wanted to impose sex education but that his only merit was to give the opposition a powerful reason to regroup. Ibid., 108, 117. On the other hand she defends the project of socialist education during Lázaro Cárdenas presidency (1934-1940). She describes Cárdenas a hero who was always right and capable of responding to all political intrigues against him. Ibid., 126–131.

⁸¹ I refer here to Britton, *Educación y Radicalismo En México I*. It was published in Spanish by the SEP in 1976.

⁸² For example in Arteaga conclusion in the chapter on sex education she only offers nouns in feminine and masculine form for children and teachers but does not explore if there were differences in discourses and practices that involved them. In general her exposition is more descriptive and she does not offer discussion of her primary sources in relation to gender theories. Also in her presentation of Catholic women that were against the introduction of school-based sex education she does not question descriptions of them by the press that presented them as mere transmitters of male views in Arteaga's words women were "less than slaves subdued to their masters," taking away from them any kind of agency. Arteaga, *A Gritos Y Sombrerazos. Historia de Los Debates Sobre La Educación Sexual En México 1906-1949*, 103.

⁸³ Sauerteig and Davidson, 'Shaping the Sexual Knowledge of the Young: Introduction', 2.

concern regarding sexuality were the dangers of children masturbating. The Enlightenment was influenced by Rousseau's conceptualization of children as innocent. The child was thought as "ideally asexual and innocent and any sexual feeling as deviant and pathological."⁸⁴ Finally, starting in early-twentieth-century Europe, children were constructed as having sexual feelings, which should follow a "normal" development.⁸⁵ Two books were of major importance in the reconceptualization of children's sexuality: Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), where he claimed that sexual impulses were present from birth; and Havelock Ellis and Albert Moll's *The Sexual Life of the Child* (1908).⁸⁶ A model of normal sexual behaviour for children was established, with "phases in a child's 'normal' development, which however, could take a pathological turn if certain developmental stages or phases were not experienced or, as in the case of autoerotism, overcome."⁸⁷ As these ideas about children's sexuality were adopted by physicians and state institutions, sex education was understood as a way to steer "normal development" of children's sexual instinct.

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, eugenics started to develop in Europe followed by other parts of the world. Eugenics in Latin America was influenced by Lamarckian hereditary notions in contrast of the Mendelian views on reproduction and heredity. Lamarckianism offered a view on genetics that gave some weight to the environmental conditions and was less biologically deterministic than

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 2–3.

Mendelian conceptions.⁸⁸ Eugenists proposed two kinds of intervention: “negative” eugenics that included measures like sterilization and euthanasia, and “positive” eugenics that highlighted the importance of changing the mentalities of people through education.⁸⁹ Eugenists with their intention to intervene in human reproduction and its concerns about venereal disease and the so called degeneration of the “race” were very important advocates of sex education in the early twentieth century.⁹⁰

Stepan argues that studies of eugenics have been European and US-centred, unlike the international spread of eugenic ideas in the interwar period. Eugenic societies appeared in different countries like England, Italy, France, Japan, the Soviet Union, Sweden, Peru, and

⁸⁸ Stern refers to it as Neo-Lamarckism and coincides with Stepan in that it influenced eugenic development in Latin Countries such as France, Romania, Argentina and Mexico. Alexandra M. Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 2005), 14. Stepan argues that the influence of Lamarckian ideas in Latin America reflect the long-standing scientific links of the region with France. Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics’: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 42.

⁸⁹ Other names for these two trends in eugenics policies were in Spain “prophylactic” eugenics and “cultural” eugenics. Jiménez-Alonso, ‘Eugenics, Sexual Pedagogy and Social Change’, 250. Estepan also refers them as “hard” and “soft” eugenics. Although there was not a clear cut division it was more common the promotion of hard eugenics in places where Mendelian conceptions dominated and “soft” eugenics where neo-Lamarckian influence was more present. Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics’: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 17.

⁹⁰ Degeneration was a term used at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe to imply that evolution could not only go in a positive way but that it could as well bring very negative outcomes. Thinkers influenced by evolutionist ideas blamed “vice, crime, immigration, women’s work and the urban environment” as responsible of degeneration. It also had a classist content as degeneration was by many thinkers the result of the propagation of illness among the poor, such as tuberculosis, syphilis alcoholism and mental illness, which were thought to be hereditary. These fears were expressed as the “rapid multiplication of the unfit”. To avoid degeneration some eugenists, like Francis Galton, believed society had to intervene helping nature to do a selection of the fit over the unfit to improve the human stock. Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics’: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 24. The meaning that “race” had for eugenists will be further explained in the text, but here I just want to make a few remarks. For eugenics, Stepan explains, “race” was linked to a racist discourse, as defined by Pierre-André Taguieff. Some groups “self-identified as dominant marked off other groups as inferior, through a language that asserted differences and created boundaries. These differences were presupposed to be fixed and natural (e.g., biological) and limit each individual member to a mental ‘type’”. Ibid., 11. Due to the constructed nature of the term “race” and its purpose to legitimize inequality, I will use it with quotation marks, (In quotes I will respect the form it was used) but I am nevertheless conscious that “race” and racialization continue to be an important issue for different forms of discriminations in different places.

Australia.⁹¹ Eugenics is often associated with the extreme cases of sterilization and euthanasia carried out in Nazi Germany. For Stepan, this equation of eugenics with fascist Germany is problematic in at least two ways. First, it erases continuities between the pre-fascist and fascist periods, and second, it discourages historians from reviewing other nations' eugenic practices.⁹²

Eugenics can also be seen as a discursive movement which actively produced knowledge and practices that intended to shape the world in a particular way. Eugenists gave prominence to differences of “race”, sex and gender,⁹³ participating in the evolving redefinition of these categories. Due to the important role that eugenists played in the promotion of sex education in the early twentieth century understanding how they constructed these differences is important for this research. The meaning of “race” varied in eugenic texts. Stepan recalls that sometimes “‘race improvement’ meant merely the genetic improvement of the ‘human race’ or ‘our people;’” but it was more likely that eugenists “were concerned with particular portions of the population, which they perceived as being divided into distinct and unequal ‘races.’”⁹⁴ The historiography of eugenics at first did not consider sex and gender differences.⁹⁵ For Stepan, this is surprising since “the novelty of eugenics as a scientific-social movement lay in its concentrated focus on human reproduction as the arena for the play of science and social policies.”⁹⁶ The inclusion of gender and sexuality, US

⁹¹ Ibid., 2.

⁹² Ibid., 4–5. I observe Alexandra Minna Stern coincides in this point with Stepan. Stern problematizes how difficult it is “to extract eugenics from the shadow of Nazism” to write the history of eugenics in the United States. Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*, 3-4.

⁹³ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 11–13.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 12–3.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 12.

historian Alexandra M. Stern claims, actually “reconfigures the history of eugenics.”⁹⁷ This interest in human reproduction made women, viewed as mothers, a special target of eugenic policies.⁹⁸

Their interest in human reproduction made sex education so attractive for eugenicists. They saw it “as a way of disciplining the sex instinct and subduing it to ‘rational’ goals.”⁹⁹ Sex education was on the agenda of eugenics in Europe, Britain, and Latin America.¹⁰⁰ I argue that sex education was perceived, and sometimes used, as a potent tool for the diffusion of eugenic and other scientific discourses into the broader society. These discourses carried assumptions about gender and sexuality, and at the same time contributed to reconfiguring or constructing them.

Eugenics, with its interest to mediate in human reproduction for the betterment of the “race” or the improvement of the human stock, is an example of a social movement, based in science, which actively tried to promote a biopolitic project. In fact, Foucault signals that eugenicists were among the first who explicitly aimed at regulating the sexuality of individuals.¹⁰¹ Foucault described their project of perfecting the species as: “an extremely exacting administration of sex (the art of determining good marriages, of inducing the desired fertilities, of ensuring the health and longevity of children).¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*, 7.

⁹⁸ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 12.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction*, 148.

¹⁰² In Foucault’s view this eugenic conception “of race tended to obliterate the aristocratic particularities of blood retaining only the controllable effects of sex”. *Ibid.* Earlier in the text he describes blood in the following terms, “It owed its high value at the same time to its instrumental role (the ability to shed blood), to the way it functioned in the order of signs (to have certain blood, to be of the same blood, to be prepared to risk one’s blood), and also its precariousness (easily spilled, subject to drying up, too readily mixed,

Ideas about children’s sexuality and eugenics had in common that they were invested with the authority of science, which was being consolidated in this period based on its claim to “facticity, neutrality, and universality.”¹⁰³ From the late nineteenth century onwards medical discourses gained influence over religious morality in defining what was acceptable and unacceptable sexual behaviour and in naturalizing differences among men and women. In this process sexualities like homosexuality or practices such as masturbation were constructed as pathological.¹⁰⁴

2.2.2. The Catholic Church and the international resistance to sex education policies

Opposition to sex education had a transnational nature, as much of it was articulated by the Catholic Church.¹⁰⁵ In December 1929, Pope Pius XI published the encyclical letter *Divini Illius Magistri*, or DIM, that explicitly opposed sex education. It argued that sex education will have the effect to wake up children’s sexual instincts. That the sole mention of sexuality issues even if it aimed at preventing sin would have the terrible consequences of promoting it. And that when youth people engaged in “evil practices” it was not because of ignorance of the intellect but because of weakness of the will. Therefore, it opposed all kinds of sex education, including that given by parents, but especially sex education given in school

capable of being quickly corrupted)”. *Ibid.*, 147. I disagree with the point that Foucault makes here about how the eugenic conception of “race” “obliterate[d] the aristocratic particularities of blood”. While I understand that Foucault’s intention here was not to offer a genealogy of the concept of “race” or the development of eugenics, I see this view at least as simplistic in the sense that it observes how certain particularities were obliterated, a difference marked by the conceptualization of aristocratic blood, but does not go deeper into which differences and hierarchies did emerge in this new conception of “race”, which in a sense inherited part of the distinctions of blood now transferred as distinctions of “race” and based on a scientific discourse. An example could be the anxieties that the “mixing of races” produced in many eugenic movements around the world, which resonates with the blood as “too readily mixed, capable of being quickly corrupted” in Foucault.

¹⁰³ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics’: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 11.

¹⁰⁴ Sauerteig and Davidson, ‘Shaping the Sexual Knowledge of the Young: Introduction’, 7.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 3; De Lucca Barrusse and Praz, ‘The Emergence of Sex Education: A Franco-Swiss Comparison, 1900-1930’, 48.

groups. DIM also opposed coeducation, which was equated with promiscuity. Pius XI defended that men and women were not the same but complementary and for that reason they should be given different education, segregated by gender, especially during adolescence. This separation of the sexes should be observed in all classes, including gymnastics. Besides Pius XI remarked that special care must be taken in preserving the modesty of young women and girls.¹⁰⁶ One year later the encyclical letter *Casti Connubii* rejected eugenic measures like contraception and abortion.¹⁰⁷ These encyclical letters reflect the importance that issues such as sex education and coeducation had during the 1930s and helped to articulate the Catholic resistance against them. In Catholic countries like Mexico and Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century, despite the increasing social authority of medicine and other scientific disciplines, the Catholic Church retained great authority in the definition of the adequate personal behaviour in great sectors of the population.

2.3. Conclusion

In the early twentieth century sex education emerged in different countries. Since the beginning it has been a very polemical phenomena, which may be one of the reasons why it has not until recently been the object of historical analysis. Sauerteig and Davidson identify four main approaches that have been used in the recent historiography of sex education. These are sex education as part of education policies, sex education as part of discourses regulating sexuality, sex education as a discursive practice that includes gender, and sex education as a field of redefinition of the public and private sphere. The various national

¹⁰⁶ Pío XI, 'Carta Encíclica: Divini Illius Magistri. Sobre La Educación Cristiana de La Juventud.', *La Santa Sede*, 31 December 1929, https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/es/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_31121929_divini-illius-magistri.html.

¹⁰⁷ Pío XI, 'Carta Encíclica: Casti Connubii. Sobre El Matrimonio Cristiano', *La Santa Sede*, 31 December 1930, <https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/es/encyclicals.index.html#encyclicals>.

examples I presented in this chapter use these different approaches. The study of France by De Luca Barrusse and Praz examines sex education as a policy, focusing on the difficulties of its implantation and the role played by different actors in its success or failure. They also highlight how Catholics fought against the state to maintain sex education within the private arena of the family and how it had a specific content regarding girls. Jiménez-Alonso's study observes how sexual pedagogy in Spain promoted discourses that intended at redefining ideal ways to be male and female. Darre's study of Uruguay also focuses on discourses and how they changed over time, but does not include gender in its analysis. There is mention of actors such Luisi or the medical field and the Catholic Church, but the interactions of actors and their agendas are not strongly developed. Two of the Mexican studies, Britton's and Del Castillo's, that focus on the 1930s initiative to introduce sex education focus on actors nevertheless they both ignore the participation of women as advocates or opponents. Britton's study does not pay attention to the content of the initiative and Del Castillo only focuses on the construction of the concept of childhood, and both are gender blind and do not explore what the content of the proposal and the protests meant for men and women, heterosexual and non-heterosexual people. On the other hand, Rubenstein includes a gender analysis, but she focuses on only one incident within the initiative. I think by reviewing primary sources on the first Mexican sex education initiative taking into account the four approaches mentioned by Sauerteig and Davidson can bring forth new information and shed light on the Mexican legacy of sex education in terms of gender and sexuality. Actors such as women, students and physicians are nearly absent in the existing historiography. In addition, the interactions and hidden agendas of actors could be further explored. Another omission in previous studies presents the question of how the discourses about sexuality and the "normal" development of the child travelled to Mexico and were adopted by the

Revolutionary government that tried to provide citizens with information on sexual issues as part of what I argue was a biopolitical project that tried to influence the lives of citizens through the diffusion of discourses with the “ideal” behaviors, rather than exercising power only through coercion.¹⁰⁸ Nor have studies analyzed the content of the initiative and the protest from a gendered lens, how the different actors that intervened in the debates carried ideals of what it meant to be male and female while at the same time also actively trying to redefine them. In terms of content it can also be explored how eugenic ideas influenced sex education in Mexico and how the international strategy adopted by the Roman Catholic Church was adopted to the Mexican environment.

¹⁰⁸ In chapter 1, section 1.1.3. I explain the concept of biopolitics as develop by Foucault. In Chapter 4, section 4.1. I explore how the Mexican government intended to regulate the life of its citizens through education and health policies that in the 1920s and 1930s were influenced by eugenic ideas.

Chapter 3.

Historical context: Mexico in early twentieth century

This chapter provides the social and political context of Mexico in the early twentieth century, which will help to situate the initiative to introduce sex education discussed from 1932 to 1934. This chapter is divided into three parts. I focus on the social and political situation, the history of education, and on women's participation in the different social processes, from the Revolution (1910) to 1934.

3.1. The Mexican Revolution and the state-building process (1910-1934)

Interpretations about the Mexican Revolution vary, and a lot has been written about it. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 was the first social revolution of the twentieth century in the world. Many historians regard it as an uprising initiated in an agrarian society, in which peasants and workers revolted against landowners and capitalists (many of them foreign) because of their outrageous living conditions. According to some historians, like Lorenzo Meyer, it is more accurate to see the Mexican Revolution as a movement of the middle-class which was marginalized by the oligarchy in power. This middle-class created alliances with the peasant and working classes to change the authoritarian and stagnant regime of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910), which didn't allow the middle-class to participate in social and political life.¹ Historian Mary Kay Vaughan argues that the revolution is best understood as part of the nascent urbanization in Latin American countries, like Argentina, Chile and Brazil, where

¹ Lorenzo Meyer, 'La Institucionalización Del Nuevo Régimen', in *Historia General de México. Versión 2000* (México: El Colegio de México, 2007), 838. Mary Kay Vaughan also shares this view. Vaughan, 'Introduction', 22.

middle and working-classes confronted oligarchic power, but that in the case of Mexico Díaz's sclerotic regime failed to negotiate a transition, which led to the armed uprising.²

The Revolution had as its most cherished social demands land reform for peasants and better working conditions for workers, and for some, like revolutionary leader Francisco I. Madero, democracy. Some women participated in the different moments of the revolution and tried to create a space for their own demands.³ In a sense, the Revolution of 1910 with all the changes it produced helped to awaken the demands of otherwise marginalized groups. But this history of hope can be contrasted with the difficulties that the subsequent ten years of war brought to the country. According to historian Bertha Ulloa, "there was not one day of peace," which led to social and economic devastation.⁴ This was a tumultuous period, full of uprisings from different revolutionary and counterrevolutionary groups, where treason and personal rivalry flourished. It was a cruel war and estimations suggest that between one and two million people died.⁵

The armed phase of the revolution started on 20 November 1910, headed by Madero. Madero came from a very rich family in the northern Mexican state of Coahuila. He opposed the re-election of president Díaz and organized the Anti-Re-electionist Party to launch his

² Vaughan, 'Introduction'.

³ In section 3.3., this chapter I explore further in this topic.

⁴ Ulloa makes this claim for the period between 1917 to 1920. This period is sometimes considered as the end of the armed phase, when the Constitutionalist group established its first government. That's why I think it also applies for the years 1910-1917 that are considered as the war years. Bertha Ulloa, 'La Lucha Armada (1910-1920)', in *Historia General de México. Versión 2000* (México: El Colegio de México, 2007), 809. All quotes from sources in Spanish are my own translation unless otherwise specified.

⁵ Ana Macías presents an estimation based on the census of 1910 and 1921 and on the projected population growth made by Charles Cumberland, which suggests that two million people died. The 1910 census counted 15,160,369 Mexicans and the 1921 census calculated 14,334,780; that is, there were 825,589 fewer inhabitants in 1921 than in 1910. Cumberland suggested that without the war the population should have been around 16 to 17 million. Anna Macías, *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940*, Contributions in Women's Studies 30 (Westport, 1982). Ibid., 49–50. Mary Kay Vaughan calculates that more than one million people died in the revolution. Vaughan, 'Introduction', 21.

own candidature for president in 1910. His slogan was “Effective Suffrage. No Re-election.” Madero was put in prison just before the election but managed to escape. Díaz was declared the winner of the presidential election on 26 June 1910. After realizing the Díaz government would not allow democratic elections, Madero and his supporters concluded that the only way to end the Díaz dictatorship was an armed insurrection. The political program of the rebellion, *Plan de San Luis*, included a clause that promised the restitution of land to those peasants who had lost it to powerful landowners during Díaz’s regime, which made many peasants join the insurrection in the hope of a better life. But Madero’s first concern was political, he wanted to establish political democracy in Mexico.⁶ Some of the leaders who would later play an active role in the revolution joined Madero, for example Francisco Villa and Emiliano Zapata. In May 1911 the revolutionary forces defeated Díaz and on 21 May 1911 the Treaty of Ciudad Juarez was signed, ending the Díaz dictatorship.⁷

Madero’s military triumph was followed by a temporary government that created discomfort between revolutionary leaders, which disagreed with Madero’s inclusion of many of Díaz’s close collaborators. Another reason was that the social, economic and political demands in the *Plan de San Luis* were not promptly addressed. This government called for elections and Madero was elected president in October 1911, in what is remembered as the first democratic election in Mexico.⁸ Madero tried to reconcile so many interests that almost

⁶ The *Plan of San Luis* is considered to have influence from other documents of the period that talked about better social and economic conditions for workers and peasants. One of this was the program of the Partido Liberal Mexicano (Mexican Liberal Party or PLM) published in 1906 and the Socio-Political Plan written by a group of people that included José Vasconcelos and Dolores Jiménez y Muro. Both plans included land reform, higher salaries for workers in rural and urban areas, maximum working hours per day and educational reform. Ulloa, ‘La Lucha Armada (1910-1920)’, 773; Macías, *Against All Odds*, 29–31.

⁷ Ulloa, ‘La Lucha Armada (1910-1920)’, 759–62.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 765–7. It would take Mexico long years and a great deal of political struggles to have another democratic election and whether the results of the popular vote are respected or not is a political issue of contemporary Mexico

everybody was left unsatisfied. Peasants and workers felt Madero was not radical enough, while the privileged classes with whom he had links because of his family thought exactly the opposite. During his government (1911 to February 1913) there were several rebellions by revolutionary and counterrevolutionary groups.⁹

In February 1913 a military coup, led by General Victoriano Huerta, put an end to the first revolutionary government. Huerta imprisoned Madero and on 22 February he ordered that Madero and his vice president, Pino Suárez, be killed. Huerta stayed in power with the support of the high bourgeoisie which saw the coup as the end of the Revolution and hoped for the return of the pre-revolutionary political, economic and social situation. The Catholic Church also backed Huerta.¹⁰

All but two Mexican states recognized Huerta's presidency.¹¹ In March 1913 Venustiano Carranza, governor of the State of Coahuila started a rebellion against Huerta. Later revolutionary leaders Villa and Zapata joined the insurrection. Before the defeat of Huerta in August 1914, the division of these three branches became apparent.¹² A war between them followed Huerta's overthrow. The Constitutionalist faction led by Carranza won.¹³ A new national constitution was proclaimed on 5 February 1917 that took into account the demands of peasants and workers. Article 27 established that the nation owned the land

⁹ Ibid., 768–72.

¹⁰ Ibid., 794. Patience Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2003), 12.

¹¹ Mexico was a Federal Republic organized in 31 states and one Federal District. The exceptions were of the state of Coahuila's Governor, Venustiano Carranza, and the state of Sonora's Congress. Ulloa, 'La Lucha Armada (1910-1920)', 793.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 797–799. Carranza called his group Constitutionalist in reference to the 1857 Mexican constitution, written, by the liberals that tried to consolidate the new nation and to limit the prerogatives of the Catholic Church.

and water. It set the foundations for land redistribution, which had been one of the strongest socio-economic demands. Article 123 granted the right to create unions and established the 8-hour work day, a day off every week and some social benefits.¹⁴ Vaughan claims that this constitution was at its time “the Western Hemisphere’s most progressive legal blueprint.”¹⁵ Later Carranza called for elections, which he won on 11 March 1917.¹⁶

In 1920 there was an armed rebellion, and Carranza was assassinated.¹⁷ According to Meyer, the killing of Carranza didn’t entail any change in the revolutionary project, it was only “the violent procedure of internal transfer of power”.¹⁸ The next president was the prestigious General Alvaro Obregon (1920-1924),¹⁹ who favoured the candidature of General Plutarco Elias Calles. A rebellion led by Adolfo de la Huerta didn’t stop Calles from being the next president (1924-1928).²⁰ At the end of Calles’ regime some changes were made in the constitution to allow Obregon to continue one more period as president. In the 1928 election Obregon was the only candidate. All appeared ‘normal’ in the succession of power when Obregon was killed by a Catholic, León Toral, who resented the anticlerical and secular policies of the Revolutionary government in the context of the Cristiada war (1926-1929) that will be explained below.²¹

The conflict between the Catholic Church and the Mexican state dates from the nineteenth century when the 1857 constitution limited the Church prerogatives and led to a

¹⁴ Ibid., 804.

¹⁵ Vaughan, ‘Introduction’, 22.

¹⁶ Ulloa, ‘La Lucha Armada (1910-1920)’, 808–9.

¹⁷ Ibid., 815–17.

¹⁸ Meyer, ‘La Institucionalización Del Nuevo Régimen’, 826.

¹⁹ Obregón was known as the General without defeat.

²⁰ Meyer, ‘La Institucionalización Del Nuevo Régimen’, 828. Adolfo de la Huerta had not relationship with the above mentioned Victoriano Huerta.

²¹ Ibid., 831.

war, known as the Reform war,²² from 1857 to 1860 between conservatives, allies of the church, and Liberals. The liberals won. During the Díaz regime, the Church was allowed to grow.²³ For this reason The Church was perceived by revolutionaries as tied with the pre-revolutionary regime. The support of the Church for Huerta's coup served to convert it into one of the most important enemies of the Revolution, making the confrontations between the Church and the state a very important element in the years during and after the Revolution. As historian Teresa Fernández-Aceves observes, both the state and the Catholic Church competed in the creation of a social program directed to civil society, including women. The Church politics were conservative and inflexible and had the intention to re-Christianise Mexican society.²⁴ The 1917 constitution stipulated clauses that aimed at diminishing the Church influence in society. For example, article 130 gave the state the right to determine the number of priests and obliged priests to register to the Interior Minister (Gobernación). Furthermore, the constitution did not recognize religious vows, nationalized church properties, it denied juridical status to the church and priests the right to vote.²⁵ Very importantly, article 3 declared that all elementary education, both public and private, had to be secular, and that private education had to follow the official programs and be subjected to state monitoring.²⁶ Article 3 also prohibited religious orders or their members from founding

²² In Spanish, la Guerra de Reforma.

²³ Díaz's period, according to Schell is known as the re-evangelization period, because Catholic institutions grew, including new dioceses, new seminaries and religious orders which reflected in the creation of hospitals, schools and orphanages under the leadership of the Catholic Church. Even if the constitution prohibited such public participation of the Church the tolerance of Díaz allowed it. Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, 3–4.

²⁴ The Church lived the secularization policies as a threat to its more or less consolidated authority among people, and for this reason they wanted to re-Christianise Mexican society, which was menaced by the actions of liberals. María Teresa Fernández Aceves, *Mujeres En El Cambio Social En El Siglo XX Mexicano* (México: Siglo XXI Editores / CIESAS, 2014), 23.

²⁵ Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, 14.

²⁶ In the next section in this chapter the situation of education will be reviewed on depth.

or running primary schools. Under the first revolutionary governments, the state was not strong enough to implement these rules,²⁷ but during the Calles administration, the confrontation between the state and the Catholic Church escalated. From February 1926 to February 1927 Calles published a series of regulatory laws to reinforce anti-religious legislation in constitutional articles 3 and 130.²⁸ Private schools were now to prove that they followed state programs, did not teach religion in their schools, had no priest in charge of their schools and did not display religious decorations. Principals of private Catholic schools sought to negotiate these regulatory measures.²⁹ Women grouped in the Union de Damas Católicas (UDCM) also defended their right to continue teaching in private schools.³⁰ But the Law published on 14 June 1926, known as Calles' Law and the Church's response to it prompted the intensification from pacific to armed resistance.³¹ The Calles' Law, which was going into effect on 31 July 1926, gave the government "the right to appoint and dismiss the clergy and regulate the number of priests in a region."³² To oppose it the Vatican and the Mexican Bishops agreed to close churches and cease masses on 1 August 1926. After this measure an armed rebellion started that lasted from 1926 to 1929, known as the Cristero

²⁷ Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, 14.

²⁸ These were: Reglamento Provisional de Escuelas Particulares (22 February 1926), Reglamento para inspeccion y Vigilancia de las Escuelas Particulares (22 July 1926), Ley reformativa del Código Penal sobre delitos del fuero común y delitos contra la Federación, en materia del culto religioso y disciplina externa (14 July 1926) and Ley reglamentaria del artículo 130 de la constitución federal (4 January 1927). Josefina Vázquez de Knauth, *Nacionalismo Y Educación En México* (El Colegio de México, 1970), 143–4.

²⁹ On 12 April 1926 Principals of Catholic schools sent a letter to the SEP, in which they argued that the regulations were against the "Natural Law" that dictated that the education of children belonged to parents. After some exchanges between the SEP authorities and the principals they agreed to review if the new rules corresponded to the spirit of the law in constitutional article 3. In October 1926 this opportunity for dialogue arrived to an end in the context of armed confrontation. See below in the text. *Ibid.*, 144–6.

³⁰ Not all women in ADCM were teachers, but many of them were. Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, 181–2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 180.

³² *Ibid.*

war.³³ In this context the National League for the Defense of Religious Liberty, or LNDLR was created.³⁴ The LNDLR was a Catholic lay organization. They organized an economic boycott in July 1926,³⁵ and later were in charge of the war. The Cristero war developed especially in the western states of Mexico (Jalisco, Guanajuato, Colima and Michoacán) and had a rural character. Cristeros³⁶ fought in name of Christ the King and supported a new constitution without anticlerical postulates and without land reform.³⁷ In 1929 negotiations between the Mexican episcopate and president Portes Gil led to the end of the armed conflict.³⁸ The episcopate reopened churches in June 1929 and the government compromised to apply the constitution with a conciliatory spirit.³⁹ This meant the end of the war although events of confrontation for religious reasons persisted during the next decade.⁴⁰

The killing of elected presidential candidate Obregon led to a severe crisis of the governing group. Before the end of his governing period, Calles created the National Revolutionary Party or PNR⁴¹ to avoid the violence associated with the transmission of

³³ For a detailed study of the Cristero war see: Jean Meyer, *La Cristiada. La Guerra de Los Cristeros*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Mexico: Siglo XXI Editores, 1983).

³⁴ In Spanish: Liga Nacional para la Defensa de la Libertad Religiosa.

³⁵ This strategy was first used by Catholic women in the state of Jalisco who fought against the implementation of the anticlerical legislation in 1918. See section 3.3.2., in this chapter.

³⁶ Cristeros was the general name given to the men who participated in the Cristero war.

³⁷ Their war yell was: ¡Viva Cristo Rey! (Long life to Christ the King!) Meyer, 'La Institucionalización Del Nuevo Régimen', 129–30.

³⁸ Cristeros had launched the war without the official consent or disapproval of the Mexican Episcopate, so the ending of the war by a negotiation of the episcopate with the state in the terms of the Acuerdos (Accords) was polemic. Schell compares the contrasting meaning of these negotiations: "To the government, the Arreglos with the church symbolized the church surrender, while to the cristeros, the Arreglos meant betrayal by their leaders". Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, 194.

³⁹ By this was meant that secularization was important for the Mexican state but they will apply legislation in a less aggressive way.

⁴⁰ Meyer, 'La Institucionalización Del Nuevo Régimen', 830. Religious conflict was present in the following decade in the implementation of education policies, such as the secularization of secondary schools and socialist education. See this chapter sections 3.2 about educational policies until 1934.

⁴¹ Partido Nacional Revolucionario.

power.⁴² Historian Lorenzo Meyer argues that the PNR was more a coalition of leaders that affiliated under the authority of Calles than a political party.⁴³ Instead of democratic elections open to the whole society, the PNR would work to generate consensus and negotiate leaders' aspirations and demands. Calles agreed with the most prominent military leaders to leave the Presidency to a civilian the lawyer Emilio Portes Gil. To change presidents again, Calles appointed General Pascual Ortiz Rubio as the new candidate. Rubio had to resign because he disagreed with Calles, and General Abelardo Rodríguez was chosen to substitute him.⁴⁴ By this time, Calles was called "Maximum Revolutionary Chief", and the period from 1928 to 1934 is known as the "Maximato," in which Calles appointed the presidents but remained the man in power. The "Maximato" ended in 1935 when the candidate designated by Calles, Lázaro Cárdenas, once in the presidency, refused to follow his former leader's orders.⁴⁵ It was under the Presidency of Abelardo Rodríguez (1932-1934), and still during the Maximato period, that the debate over sex education in public schools took place.

⁴² The PNR with different names hold the presidency of Mexico without a break until 2000.

⁴³ Meyer, 'La Institucionalización Del Nuevo Régimen', 833. Meyer notices that in Mexico, before the PNR political parties had had a personalist character, founded by a political leader in a moment of political influence, but promptly disappearing if the political leader to which it was linked lost its influence. That was the case of the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista founded by Carranza and that disappeared after Carranza's death. Likewise the Partido Laborista (Labour Party) linked to the CROM lost its influence when its leader Morones stopped to be appreciated by the revolutionaries in power. Opposite to this intermittent parties was the Partido Comunista Mexicano (Mexican Communist Party, or PCM). The PCM evolved from the Partido Socialista Mexicano (Mexican Socialist Party) and was founded in 1919 with links to the Soviet Comintern. Some revolutionary leaders joined it for a time and then left it, like Francisco Mújica and Felipe Carrillo Puerto. The PCM also had an ambivalent position with the national government, sometimes forging alliances with some revolutionary leaders and sometimes being the target of violent repression. Even if the PCM managed to survive in the opinion of Meyer it never exceeded its marginal character. *Ibid.*, 833, 845. For a well-documented history of origins of the PCM see: Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Los Bolchevikis: Historia Narrativa de Los Orígenes Del Comunismo En México (1919-1925)* (Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1986).

⁴⁴ Accordingly to Meyer, Ortiz Rubio had to resign on 2 September 1932 because he lost Calles support after showing some signs of independence like appointing his own ministers without the Calles's authorization. Meyer, 'La Institucionalización Del Nuevo Régimen', 832.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 832-34.

Revolutionary leaders supported a rhetoric that highlighted the importance of solving Mexico's social problems, rather than just bringing "modernization," in contrast with the pre-revolutionary regime.⁴⁶ This rhetoric transformed into some social benefits but was sometimes considered demagogic as corruption was evident and many social problems remained. Examples of the benefits were land reform, better working conditions, and expansion of public education. During the land reform, 7.6 million of hectares were redistributed from 1917 to 1934.⁴⁷ On the second aspect, workers affiliated with the pro-government union CROM⁴⁸ had increases of salaries superior to those of other workers organizations and received compensations in case of being fired or work accidents.⁴⁹ The third aspect was the determination to extend education opportunities in general.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Meyer argues that after 12 years of Constitutionalist government (from 1917 to 1929) it was clear that some military leaders had used their positions for their personal benefit, some of them having become powerful landowners.⁵¹ CROM leaders also benefited from corruption, visible in their luxurious lifestyle impossible with workers' average means.⁵² Corruption, the incomplete spread of social benefits promised by the Revolution

⁴⁶ Porfirio Díaz regime, is known as having promoting modernization but that only benefited an elite. *Ibid.*, 825.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 836. In Meyer's opinion the large state system was not deeply altered by this land redistribution giving peasants only 15 percent of fertile land.

⁴⁸ The CROM was founded in May 1917. It was directed by Luis N. Morones. The CROM received money from the government and also asked fees to its members. It had links with the American Federation of Labor. The leaders of the CROM created the secret organization called "Grupo Acción" (Action Group) to negotiate with the different revolutionary leaders and also created a political party, Partido Laborista (Labour Party) in 1919. Ulloa, 'La Lucha Armada (1910-1920)', 811. The CROM had support from presidents Obregon and Calles and in Meyer's opinion the CROM was the most important workers' organization in the 1930's although not the only one. Meyer, 'La Institucionalización Del Nuevo Régimen', 843.

⁴⁹ Meyer, 'La Institucionalización Del Nuevo Régimen', 846.

⁵⁰ Vázquez de Knauth, *Nacionalismo Y Educación En México*, 133–61. In the next section, 3.2., I will focus on the development of the educational system after the revolution.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 830-838.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 833.

and political exclusion contributed to the mobilization of several groups at the end of the 1920s, with no necessary connection among them. Some groups were, peasants, workers, women, Catholics men and women, and political opposition that supported presidential candidate José Vasconcelos in 1929.⁵³

3.2. Education policies from 1920 to 1934

The biggest effort to organize public education after the Revolution occurred during Obregon's administration (1920-1924), when the Ministry of Public Education or SEP⁵⁴ was founded at the end of 1921.⁵⁵ José Vasconcelos, former rector of the National University, became the first SEP Minister (1921-1924). In 1921 Mexico was still a rural country. Only 4,465,504 out of 14,334,780 inhabitants, lived in an urban area. Illiteracy was widespread, with only about 24 percent of the population (1,878,434 men and 1,686, 333 women) able to

⁵³ Ibid., 830; Macías, *Against All Odds*, 126; Verna Carleton Millan, *Mexico Reborn* (Cambridge: The Riberside Press, 1939), 48.

⁵⁴ Secretaría de Educación Pública.

⁵⁵ After Mexico's independence (1821) the new government was in process of organization and most schools continued to be controlled by Catholic organizations. After the Reforma war (1857-1860) and the French intervention (1863-1867) the liberal governments made an effort to establish state controlled public schools. An education Law published on 1867 declared that primary education should be compulsory, free and secular. Most public schools were in charge of municipalities, which had little resources and varied curricula. Joaquín Baranda, Díaz's minister of justice and public instruction (1882-1901) did the first efforts to create a national system of education. In 1905 following the initiative of intellectual Justo Sierra, Díaz separated the Ministry of Education called now Secretaría de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes, or SIPBA. The SIPBA was directed by Sierra and aimed at expanding education for children and adults, to create a national identity and to lead Mexico to progress. After the Revolution in 1917 Carranza decided eliminate the Ministry of Education (SIPBA) and let the responsibility of education again to municipalities. Due to the precarious conditions of the latter, this measure represented a setback in the establishment of a national system of education, which was nevertheless seen as an advantage by Catholic organizations that had an important participation in education. Vázquez de Knauth, *Nacionalismo Y Educación En México*, 133-7; Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, 5-9; Maria de Lourdes Alvarado, *La Educación Superior Femenina En El México Del Siglo XIX: Demanda Social Y Reto Gubernamental* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro de Estudios sobre la Universidad, Plaza y Valdez editores, 2004), 138-48.

read and write.⁵⁶ Vasconcelos showed interest in literacy before the creation of the SEP when he launched the one-teach-one campaign in which every person that could read and write, including children who had finished primary school, was encouraged to teach others.⁵⁷ Through the SEP the revolutionary governments aimed to achieve the long-time desired system of national education⁵⁸ and to create a homogenous population with a strong national identity that were able at the same able to integrate in the “modernization” process.⁵⁹ In this early stage, SEP’s priorities were primary, vocational and rural education.⁶⁰ There was also an interest in establishing technical education for indigenous groups⁶¹ and rural areas. Apart from formal education, the SEP also aimed at the diffusion of culture and was divided in three sections: schools, libraries and fine arts.⁶² Vasconcelos’s period achieved a great allocation of resources for education, amounting to fifteen percent of the national budget in

⁵⁶ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 105.

⁵⁷ Vázquez de Knauth, *Nacionalismo Y Educación En México*, 138; Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, 17.

⁵⁸ According to Schell the first efforts to create a national education system came from Joaquín Baranda, Minister of education from 1882-1901. *Ibid.*, 5–7.

⁵⁹ Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*.

⁶⁰ Vocational schools were a kind of technical schools that provided students with preparation in crafts or occupations, with a flexible organization (students could decide which subjects to take) and were segregated by sex with a different curricula. Rural education aimed at providing education to peasants. Vasconcelos gave a strong input to rural education creating the Cultural Missions, which were a group of professionals that moved from one town to another. Vasconcelos took inspiration from religious missionaries of the sixteenth century that brought education to remote areas. A Cultural Mission was often composed by a group of teachers, which included a physical education teacher, and expert on handicrafts, an expert on school organization, a social worker, and an expert on hygiene, infant care and first aid. The idea was to coordinate academic courses with agriculture and industrial handicrafts. To prepare teachers for the permanent rural schools was funded the Regional Normal (Regional teacher training school). Patience Schell, ‘Gender Class, and Anxiety at the Gabriela Mistral Vocational School, Revolutionary Mexico City’, in *Sex in Revolution. Gender Politics and Power in Modern México*, ed. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 112–25; Vázquez de Knauth, *Nacionalismo Y Educación En México*, 138–9.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 138. Indigenous education aimed at integrating indigenous groups through the process of miscegenation and acculturation, with the idea to create a homogenous population in which indigenous groups will correct those aspects that were seen as negative to the achievement of progress. Beatriz Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)* (Mexico: Tusquets, 2007), 32–3.

⁶² Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, 18.

1922-1923.⁶³ In 1923, the SEP adopted the pedagogy-of-action education, inspired in the child-centred theories of European and North American pedagogues like John Dewey, Adolfo Ferreire and Maria Montessori. Vaughan argues that this education paradigm remained present in SEP programs until 1938, which helped the government aim of creating a national identity and improving Mexicans productive abilities.⁶⁴

During Calles' administration, public education continued with the promotion of technical, rural and indigenous education and efforts were made to increase the number of secondary schools.⁶⁵ As above mentioned, the Calles administration was marked by the conflict between the Catholic Church and the State produced by the resistance of the Church against the enforcement at the national level of the anticlerical aspects of the 1917 constitution. In this state-Church confrontation, education played an important role. The Catholic resistance to new regulations produced a decline in school attendance due to private schools' closures and a boycott of government schools. Some Catholic schoolteachers also lost their jobs.⁶⁶ However, historian Patience Schell found that the majority of schools in Mexico City "superficially adapted to the new restrictions while offering covert Catholic education."⁶⁷ There was tolerance of Catholic practices at the grassroots level, with some inspectors turning a blind eye if the Catholic schools did not follow all regulations. Schell thinks that some people in SEP thought as "Vasconcelos himself had: better Catholic education than no education."⁶⁸ This tolerance also reflects the limited widespread of

⁶³ Vázquez de Knauth, *Nacionalismo Y Educación En México*, 141.

⁶⁴ Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 27.

⁶⁵ Vázquez de Knauth, *Nacionalismo Y Educación En México*, 142.

⁶⁶ Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, 185.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.

anticlerical ideas and the strong-hold of Catholicism in Mexican society. In fact, Schell argues that the aims of Catholic social action and the state's social goals overlapped, but in a context of confrontation the state did not seek to join forces with Catholics. Instead the church was perceived as a “serious political and cultural treat to the revolutionary state-in-formation.”⁶⁹

According to historian Vázquez de Knauth, the period from 1928 to 1934 was less beneficial in the education sector than the period of 1921 to 1928 due both to the economic crisis and the political instability resulting from frequent presidential changes. Nevertheless, in the period of Narciso Bassols as Minister of education from October 1931 to May 1934 (in the presidential periods of Ortiz Rubio and Rodríguez) rural, technical and indigenous education was reorganized. Bassols was a Marxist and a professed anticlerical.⁷⁰ Bassols believed in the intervention of the state to regulate the irrationalities of the market. Bassols, like some revolutionary men, considered that education should teach Mexicans to work for the common good, in a kind of collectivism as an alternative to individualism. In Bassols's view the state should “redistribute wealth and mobilize the collectivity for modernity through technology applied to production and through science applied to physical and mental health.”⁷¹ As a professed anticlerical, Bassols sought to implement secular education in secondary schools, and prohibited any participation of members of religious congregations in education (before they were only excluded from running schools), which revived the

⁶⁹ Ibid., 14. Catholic social action in Mexico refers to Catholic organizations that from the 1900 onward promoted just wages, protective labour legislation and the formation of Catholic unions as established in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* published in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII. This encyclical letter condemned socialism, liberalism and class struggle. Schell, ‘Gender Class, and Anxiety at the Gabriela Mistral Vocational School’, 4.

⁷⁰ Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México I*, 12.

⁷¹ Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 31.

conflict between the Catholic Church and the state.⁷² Bassols also required big employers to create education for workers as stipulated in article 123 of the 1917 constitution. Bassols' period was stormy as he faced conflict from different fronts. Bassols gave priority to *useful* technical education over the university, which he saw as conservative. In 1932 Bassols intended to introduce school-based sex education. In the winter of 1933-1934 the PNR held a convention to create a sexennial plan that should serve as a guide to the future president. In this convention, a proposal to implement socialist education was approved.⁷³ The initiatives of sex education and socialist education produced strong protest of Catholic organizations that combined with teacher leaders' protests led to Bassols' resignation in May 1934.⁷⁴

3.3. Women's history in revolutionary Mexico

Despite the participation of numerous women in the Revolution they were at first excluded from the historiography.⁷⁵ Vaughan contents that the majority of male Mexican historians derided women's history as an act of "romantic willfulness: the search for small groups of insignificant actors in obscure places."⁷⁶ According to her, recent historiography that incorporates the insights from women's and gender history has uncovered not only women's participation but also revealed how gender was integral to the composition of the state, the

⁷² For example, in January 1932 Mexico's Archbishop, Pascual Díaz, in a Pastoral Letter prohibited parents to send their children to the official secondary schools. Vázquez de Knauth, *Nacionalismo Y Educación En México*, 147.

⁷³ For evaluations on the Mexican project of socialist education see: Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México I*; Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México II*; Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*; Vázquez de Knauth, *Nacionalismo Y Educación En México*.

⁷⁴ Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México I*, 103–4. In Chapter 5 that deals with the initiative of sex education I will explore some of these issues in detail.

⁷⁵ Vaughan, 'Introduction', 22. For example Macías narrates that when she decided to research about the feminist movement in Mexico from 1890 to 1940 she was discouraged on the grounds that a feminist movement had never existed in Mexico. Macías, *Against All Odds*, xii.

⁷⁶ Vaughan, 'Introduction', 23.

economy and the marketplace.⁷⁷ This thesis wants to contribute this field by exploring how gender and sexuality were constructed in the debates over sex education in the 1930s, showing how the state and other actors fought to construct the categories men and woman and to provide them with particular meanings.

The reasons why women's political participation was initially invisible in the historiography may be varied. Historian Fernandez-Aceves in the context of the Mexican Revolution argues that while men's revolutionary and political actions were commemorated, women's revolutionary and political participation was actively forgotten because it disrupted the social order and the accepted gender identities.⁷⁸ Bellow, I will present important information about women's condition in the early twentieth century and about their activism and demands. I will emphasise the changing role of women in Mexican society at the time and the anxieties that it produced.

3.3.1. Women's education and work before the Revolution

Women's demands for more educational opportunities in Mexico date from the seventeenth century when famous writer Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695) advocated equal educational opportunities for women.⁷⁹ In the second half of the nineteenth century, women advocated for secondary education for women. Based on the educational law of 1867, the

⁷⁷ Ibid. See for example: Fernández Aceves, *Mujeres En El Cambio Social En El Siglo XX Mexicano*; Gabriela Cano, *Se Llamaba Elena Arizmendi* (México: Tusquets, 2010).

⁷⁸ Fernández Aceves, *Mujeres En El Cambio Social En El Siglo XX Mexicano*, 25.

⁷⁹ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 4-6. Equal education with men was not achieved but from 1700 to 1810 some institutions for women's education were created in Mexico City. Women education was limited and elitist, nevertheless in 1790 it outnumbered that of Madrid. As shown in the next quote from Macías, "In 1790 there were some 56,932 women in Mexico City, and those age eight to sixteen numbered 8,753. There were six schools for young women at the time, with a total enrolment of 759. Of these, 266 attended Las Vizcaínas. At about the same time Madrid also had six schools for girls, but with a total of only 455 students". Note 20, Ibid., 19.

secondary school for girls and the National Preparatory High School or ENP were created.⁸⁰ The ENP was intended as a male institution to prepare men for professional education but opened its doors to some women years later. Liberals viewed women's education as an strategy to prepare them as mothers and to counteract the influence that the Catholic Church had on women.⁸¹ The secondary school included some practical subjects that could allow women to find a job. It also functioned as a Normal school. In 1871 the Women's Arts and Crafts School⁸² was established, adding more educational and work opportunities for women, with fifteen courses including embroidery, watchmaking, bookbinding, photography, tapestry making, and telegraphy, as well as some scientific courses.⁸³ Some women who had aspirations to professional education were allowed to enter the ENP from 1883.⁸⁴ The first one was Matilde Montoya who graduated as a physician in 1887. The second doctor was Columba Rivera in 1900 and the first Lawyer was María Sandoval de Zarco in 1898.⁸⁵

At the end of the Díaz regime (1876-1910), many women worked for a wage. Some middle-class women worked as teachers and 1,785 women were civil servants. In 1895 some 275,000 working-class women worked as domestic servants, and it is unknown the number that worked as prostitutes.⁸⁶ The 1910 census reported that women represented 8.8 percent of the economically active population. However Macias observes many women's economical

⁸⁰ Escuela Nacional Preparatoria.

⁸¹ Alvarado, *La Educación Superior Femenina En El México Del Siglo XIX*, 148–155.

⁸² Escuela de Artes y Oficios de Mujeres

⁸³ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 10.

⁸⁴ Alvarado, *La Educación Superior Femenina En El México Del Siglo XIX*, 157.

⁸⁵ Gabriela Cano, 'Ansiedades de Género En México Frente Al Ingreso de Las Mujeres a Las Profesiones de Medicina Y Jursiprudencia', *Projeto História, São Paulo*, no. 45 (December 2012): 14–15.

⁸⁶ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 12.

activities were not considered in the census, which served to reproduce ideal gender roles of men as breadwinners and women as economically inactive and dependant.⁸⁷

The first expressions of women's demands came from educated women. An early example is the magazine *La mujer mexicana* (The Mexican Woman), published in 1904, that was exclusively run by women. Its founders were Columba Rivera (1870-1943), María Sandoval de Zarco (1876-19??) and the teacher Dolores Correa Zapata (1853–1924). Their most important demands were more education for women at all levels, including more secondary and vocational schools, access to the professions and a single sexual standard for both sexes. These demands would remain important in Mexican women's feminist agenda in the first half of the century. They argued that a good education would allow women to be part of the progress of Mexico and to gain a living if necessary.⁸⁸ On sexual matters they showed concern about prostitution and they criticized polygamy, which they observed was more common than monogamy but was tolerated both by the Catholic Church and the Civil Code of 1884.⁸⁹ This code, inspired on the Code Napoleon, prohibited the investigation of fatherhood and treated adultery unequally; a woman's adultery was always a motive for legal separation whereas a man's adultery almost never was.⁹⁰ The Civil Code also denied married women any right to administer or make use of their own property. This middle-class women

⁸⁷ For example rural women's productive activities inside the home, which they sell in the local markets. The census also ignored artisans, pieceworkers, street vendors and boarding-house owners, among others. *Ibid.*, 31–2.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 11–3.

⁸⁹ Macias summarizes the prostitution and family arrangements at the beginning of the twentieth century México in the following way: "In 1907, with only one-fifth the population of Paris, México City had twice as many *registered* prostitutes, and Paris was supposed to be the sin city of the West. Another sign of the dysfunction in Mexican society is that about 30 percent of Mexican mothers were single parents. In addition about 80 percent of the adult population lived in *amasiato*, or free union, yet illegitimate children had no legal rights to inheritance and could not investigate their paternity". *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁰ The law stated that if a man committed adultery in his family home, kept a mistress, made a public scandal or he or his lover abused his wife, then it could be a motive for legal separation. *Ibid.*, 15.

created a school-factory of embroidery and hats for working-class women, were the latter were paid just wages.⁹¹

Men, some very famous, opposed these early expressions of feminism at the beginning of the century. For example, Justo Sierra, the Minister of education (1905-1911), advised women schoolteachers “not to pursue their feminism to the point of wishing to convert themselves into men.”⁹² He recommended women not to fight over political questions, so that all the charms of life would not be lost.⁹³ It was common to express that feminism masculinized women, like sociologist José Hernández and prominent anthropologist Manuel Gamio did. I observe that these expression wanted to generate a negative image of women to discourage them for fighting for social and political equality. Men’s opposition to women’s changing role also concerned issues related to reproduction, sexuality and “race.” For example, Ignacio Gamboa, a conservative writer from the state of Yucatan, expressed that the consequences of feminism were: “divorce, feminine associations against matrimony, and the vice of lesbianism, which, by an immense unfortune assumes gigantic proportions in the largest cities.”⁹⁴ These declarations prove that changes in women’s roles were not welcome but also that feminism was making its entry into Mexican society.

3.3.2. Revolutionary times and revolutionary women

Women were included in the mobilization produced by the Mexican Revolution. Some educated and middle-class women contributed in an intellectual way and were part of a

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 14–5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

burgeoning political activism. They created political clubs to support their candidates, wrote in newspapers to criticize President Díaz and later general Huerta, and after President Madero's assassination many of them joined other factions of the Revolution, especially the Zapatist and the Constitutionalist groups. Some examples were the brave journalist Juana Belén Gutierrez de Mendoza (1875-1942). She edited her own newspaper and openly opposed president Díaz, who imprisoned but never managed to silence her.⁹⁵ The socialist teacher Dolores Jimenez y Muro (1848-1925), was also jailed by Diaz. After Madero's death in 1913 both of them joined the Zapatist movement until the assassination of Zapata in 1919.⁹⁶ Another example is Hermila Galindo (1896-1954), who was Mexico's most prominent feminist from 1915 to 1919. Galindo supported the Constitutionalist revolutionary faction and worked as Carranza's personal secretary. Probably due to the protection that she thus enjoyed, she had more freedom to express radical views without being repressed. She was in favour of divorce and sex education, talked in public about women's sexuality, challenged social values for example by accusing the Catholic Church as chief obstacle to promote feminism, and was the first woman who asked for full political rights for women in Mexico.⁹⁷ Another Constitutionalist was Atala Apodaca. She was a schoolteacher in the state of Jalisco who participated in politics since the campaigns in favour of Madero. After the Constitutionalist arrival in Guadalajara in July 1914, she became very close to the ruling

⁹⁵ Diaz imprisoned Gutiérrez de Mendoza several times, but once free she would continue with her journalistic work against the dictatorship. In 1910 Diaz confiscated her press as a way to silence her. During Madero's presidency, through intermediation of Madero's sister Ángela, Gutiérrez de Mendoza received an economical compensation for the confiscation of her press. *Ibid.*, 25–9.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29–32.

⁹⁷ Galindo's close connection to Carranza was a double-edged sword as it partly explains why Galindo after being the most prominent feminist figure totally withdrew from public life after the assassination of Carranza. Other reasons given by Macías were her support for the wrong candidate (she supported General Pablo González instead of the finally winning group of Obregon) and third, her ideas made uncomfortable not only conservative groups but also many revolutionary male leaders. *Ibid.*, 32–7.

military and male political leaders. Apodaca was an excellent speaker, promoted the organization of women and advocated for women's education.⁹⁸ She contended women needed "to be educated in their own interest and the interest of humanity and not for a man."⁹⁹ Galindo and Apodaca are clear examples of revolutionary women who worked closely with revolutionary leaders and shared these leaders' anticlerical views.

Women also had an active role in the Revolution's military campaigns. According to Macias, women from the lower classes joined the revolutionary movement in two different ways, as *soldaderas* and as soldiers. *Soldaderas* were the Mexican soldiers's women.¹⁰⁰ These unusual women were remarked on by many observers of the Mexican revolution.¹⁰¹ The presence of *soldaderas* in the state of Morelos made writer Rosa E. King claim that "the zapatistas were not at army; they were a people in arms."¹⁰² They were following their men to war and once in the camps they were in charge of searching for food and preparing it, washing the clothes and tending the wounded. Women soldiers took the arms just like men did and some achieved the range of colonel, such as four Zapatista colonels: María de la Luz Espinoza Barrera, Remedios Farrera and Rosa Mójica Bobadilla.¹⁰³ As Macías argues, not all women soldiers came from poor families, for example Ramona Reyes, a colonel in the

⁹⁸ Fernández Aceves, *Mujeres En El Cambio Social En El Siglo XX Mexicano*, 136–159.

⁹⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁰⁰ This was the English translation made by Rosa E. King in her book *Tempest Over Mexico*, that Macias considers is the most appropriate translation of the term. Other translations were Frederick Turner's lady soldiers, that is misleading, because women soldiers and *soldaderas* performed different roles; and Robert E. Quirk "camp followers", which makes sense as *soldaderas* didn't leave the camps in case their man died but rather would become sexually linked to another soldier. Unfortunately in Spanish there is not an official definition of *soladadera* even if they were important actors in the revolution and were portrayed in pictures, paints and novels. Macías, *Against All Odds*, 40.

¹⁰¹ For example they were represented by painter José Clemente Orozco and graphic artist José Guadalupe Posada, famous photographer Casasola captured their real looks, and many writers of fiction and non-fiction on the Mexican Revolution often stressed the presence of *soldaderas*. *Ibid.*, 39–40.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 42–3.

Constitutionalist army, did not. Born in the northern State of Sinaloa, she was a 23-year old widow in 1913 when Madero was assassinated. She decided to sell her business and go to the United States and buy guns to arm her friends and the workers and joined the war against Huerta.¹⁰⁴ The Revolution also allowed for the expression of sexual identities that otherwise were not accepted. This was the case of Amelio Robles, who was a female to male transgender who through his participation in the war gained social recognition of his masculinity and lived as a man for seventy of his ninety-four years.¹⁰⁵

Women also participated in the Revolution as nurses. For example, Elena Arizmendi, who worked actively for the foundation of the White Neutral Cross established on 5 May 1911, and became its honorary president.¹⁰⁶ Another famous nurse was Beatriz González Ortega, who attended the wounded in Zacatecas in the fight between Villistas and Federals. She burned the wounded soldiers' uniforms, to avoid their identification. Beatriz González

¹⁰⁴ 'Heroína de La Revolución Y Coronela Del Ejército Constitucionalista, La Sra. Ramona Reyes Vda. de Flores', *Boletín Militar*, 13 October 1914, BPEJ.

¹⁰⁵ Macias refers to him as Amelia Robles, his feminine name. Gabriela Cano points out that the memory and historiography that silences Amelio's transgender identity and present him as a woman is homophobic and shows an anxiety to put Amelio back into a female gender identification that he refused for most of his life. This makes Cano to affirm that "the most arduous battle fought by Colonel Robles was not out in the open and did not smell of gunpowder, nor did it required bearing the agrarian ideological arms of the Mexican Revolution. It was a cultural battle, a slow and silent struggle, whose great victory was to become a man by denying a female physical anatomy". Gabriela Cano, 'Unconcealable Realities of Desire. Amelio Robles (Transgender) Masculinity in the Mexican Revolution', in *Sex in Revolution. Gender Politics and Power in Modern México*, ed. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 35–56. Quote from page 53. Cano uses the term homophobic. I think it would be more accurate to refer it as transphobic, nevertheless Cano clearly makes the point about the right of different subjectivities to decide about their gender performance and the need for society and historiography to recognize it.

¹⁰⁶ Arizmendi was a supporter of Madero, who had studied nursery in Texas from 1909 to 1911. She denounced the lack of neutrality of the Mexican Red Cross because it only attended the wounded in the Federal forces. Cano, *Se Llamaba Elena Arizmendi*, 62–3, 80–2, 86–8.

risked her life when Villa asked her to identify Federal men and she answered: “here I tend only wounded Mexicans.”¹⁰⁷

Not only women who supported the Revolution were active in the public sphere. Catholic women also had an active role in opposing revolutionaries’ secular and anticlerical policies.¹⁰⁸ In 1912 the Association of Catholic Ladies or ADC¹⁰⁹ was created in Mexico City under the supervision of a Jesuit priest, and soon ADC branches were established in other states. Even if women’s activism was seen as “an unfortunate necessity” by the proponents of Catholic social action, it was welcomed as long as it was subordinated to the episcopate and would fit with the duty of “wives and mothers to protect their loved ones”.¹¹⁰ Catholic women established schools, participated in evangelization and moralization campaigns and charitable works; they promoted Catholic marriages, visited prisons, supported hospitals, and realized campaigns against prostitution and venereal disease. They also helped in the creation of Catholic women unions.¹¹¹ Historian Kristina Boylan claims that even if Catholic women did not support structural change with their activities, they tried to ameliorate social conditions and had a public and political role. But Catholic women have been especially remembered for their opposition to the state’s anticlerical policies.¹¹² They protested against the closing of churches and the harassment and exile of some priest and nuns during and after

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Macías, *Against All Odds*, 39.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 25; Fernández Aceves, *Mujeres En El Cambio Social En El Siglo XX Mexicano*, 50–4.

¹⁰⁹ Asociación de Damas Católicas.

¹¹⁰ Kristina A. Boylan, ‘Gendering the Faith and Altering the Nation. Mexican Catholic Women’s Activism, 1917-1940’, in *Sex in Revolution. Gender Politics and Power in Modern México*, ed. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 202.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 204–5.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 216. As mentioned before the historiography about the Revolution invisibilized the role of revolutionary women, but the idea that all women were conservative and religious was supported by Catholic women’s activism, that was used many times as an excuse to negate women the right to vote. See below in the text.

the revolution and against the implementation of anticlerical legislation. An early example of this was a potent protest in the state of Jalisco against the publication of decrees 1913 and 1917, published by military governor Manuel M. Diéguez in July 1918, which obliged priests to register to the Minister of the Interior and allowed only one priest for five thousand residents. Catholic women organized an economic boycott against the government, which achieved that the decrees were revoked.¹¹³ As mentioned in section 3.1., in 1926 president Calles's intention to apply similar legislation plus the application of secular measures in education prompted the beginning of the Cristero War.

In 1916, under the auspices of Salvador Alvarado's¹¹⁴ military government, the first Mexican Feminist Congress was organized in the state of Yucatan in January 1916.¹¹⁵ Alvarado appointed schoolteacher Consuelo Zavala to head the organizing committee. Although women were in charge of organizing the congress, Alvarado defined the agenda of the discussion, which included freeing women from the yoke of tradition, the role of primary school in preparing women for life's challenges, the skills that women needed to be active actors of progress, and which public offices women could fill.¹¹⁶ Alvarado also indicated that only honest and educated women were invited to the congress.¹¹⁷ The attendants were

¹¹³ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 48–9.

¹¹⁴ Alvarado had socialist ideals and was strongly committed to the ideals of the Mexican revolution. Carranza appointed Alvarado governor of Yucatan in March 1915. Accordingly to Macías, Alvarado had a reputation of being an incorruptible man and acted in Yucatan as an "enlightened despot." Alvarado was the only Constitutionalist leader that considered women's emancipation was an integral part in the project for justice of the weak and oppressed. Alvarado supported the idea that women should be independent and legally the same as men, thus stood for more education and work opportunities for women. *Ibid.*, 64–68.

¹¹⁵ It was the first feminist congress organized in Mexico and the second in Latin America. The first one was realized in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1910. Note 84 in: *Ibid.*, 84.

¹¹⁶ Macías highlights that this procedure to set the agenda of the Congress was a common practice of Alvarado and other Constitutionalist leaders and it was not exclusive of the First Feminist Congress of 1916. *Ibid.*, 71–2.

¹¹⁷ In Macías view, to invite "honest" women meant that prostitutes could not be invited to the congress. This may have been a measure to keep clean the name of feminist against attacks of conservative men like

620 middle-class women with a wide range of political views, from conservative to radical, which led to conflict among the delegates during the sessions. Radical views were supported among others by Hermila Galindo, who sent a paper entitled *La mujer del porvenir* (Woman in the future) in which she spoke about women's sexual drive and the need of sex education for women to understand and control their own bodies. These claims and her positions in favour of divorce and against the sexual double standard and prostitution stunned the audience.¹¹⁸ The conservative group was represented by Francisca Garcia Ortiz who believed that getting married was more important for women than having an education. For this reason she opposed secondary education for women because, she argued, "Schoolteachers do not marry."¹¹⁹ The congress conclusions show that women were in favour of secular education and more women studying to be teachers or perform other occupations so that they would be able to earn a living and then could marry out of choice and not out of necessity.¹²⁰ Women at the congress also agreed on the need to modify the Civil Code of 1884 and demanded women's right to vote and be elected in municipal elections in the state of Yucatan.¹²¹

3.3.3. Women's activism after the revolution and until 1934

Yucatan under governors Salvador Alvarado (1915-1918) and Felipe Carrillo Puerto (1922-1923), both socialists, saw the most advanced promotion of women's rights in México at its time. In 1922 women were granted the right to vote and in that same year schoolteacher Rosa

Ignacio Gamboa from Yucatan who declared that feminist were just 'bad women', referring to prostitutes. Ibid., 72.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 72-4.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in: Ibid., 74.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 75-6.

¹²¹ The initiative for women to vote in the municipal level had a lot of supporters, full political rights for women were debated in the previous days of the congress showing different positions. The more radical delegates were in favour, the conservative were against and the moderates thought that it was too early for women to participate in politics in all levels. Ibid., 76-7.

Torres was the first woman to hold an elective office in Mexico when she became the president of the Municipal Council of Merida, Yucatan. In 1923, three women were elected deputies in the local legislature, Elvia Carrillo Puerto (sister of Felipe Carrillo Puerto), Beatriz Peniche and Raquel Dzib. This victory didn't last long; in January 1924 governor Carrillo was killed by his political enemies and when socialists regained power in Yucatan in March that year, they did not reinstate the women deputies.¹²²

The 1920's were very active years for Mexican women; they created several organizations and fought for the right to vote, continued to demand more vocational and professional education for women and supported child health policies and the reform of the Civil Code. The emergence of professional women and office workers was linked to the rise of feminism in Mexico. In 1921 women were the majority of primary school teachers in a proportion of almost three women to one men. Women teachers were strong promoters of women's and social causes. Based on information of the 1921 census, Macias remarks that "10,000 Mexican women were listed as exercising a skill or a profession, including 602 secondary schoolteachers, 1,962 trained midwives, 276 druggists, 170 doctors, 27 dentists, 11 lawyers, 32 accountants and, 19 real estate agents, and several thousand typists."¹²³ Working-class women also worked outside their homes, "207, 971 were domestic servants, 49, 026 were involved in commerce, 28, 568 worked in agriculture, and 1,503 in the mines."¹²⁴ About 193,453 women also worked in industry, composing 30 percent of the industry workforce, plus 102, 969 unemployed women.¹²⁵ Women's participation in the

¹²² *Ibid.*, 90–1.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

workforce was considered transgressive of traditional gender roles and often the introduction of machinery in some areas traditionally occupied by women meant that they were displaced in favour of men.¹²⁶ Historian Susan Gauss has also researched how the entry of women to the workforce and unions was fought by male union's rhetoric that promoted a model of masculinity as productive breadwinners and femininity as dependant and reproductive.¹²⁷ Working-class women also created organizations like the Western Feminist Circle or CFO¹²⁸ founded in 1927 by Maria Arcelia Díaz with the intention to fight for women's moral and economic progress.¹²⁹

Some examples of women's organizations in the 1920s are the National Council of Mexican Women or CNM¹³⁰ founded by Elena Torres and a group of progressive women in Mexico City in 1918. In 1920 CNM changed its name to Feminist Council of Mexico.¹³¹ Torres, a friend of Galindo, was a Yucatan educator who established the first Montessori school in Mexico and held radical feminist views. In 1918 Torres and Felipe Carrillo Puerto were among the organizers of the Latin American Bureau of the Third International.¹³² The Association of Mexican Women Doctors was founded in 1929 and aimed to promote Mexican women's inclusion in this professional field.¹³³

¹²⁶ María Teresa Fernández Aceves, 'The Struggle between "Metate" and the "Molinos de Nixtamal" in Guadalajara, 1920-1940', in *Sex in Revolution. Gender Politics and Power in Modern México*, ed. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 147–61.

¹²⁷ Susan M. Gauss, 'Working-Class Masculinity and the Rationalized Sex. Gender and Industrial Modernization in the Textile Industry in Postrevolutionary Puebla', in *Sex in Revolution. Gender Politics and Power in Modern México*, ed. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 181–96.

¹²⁸ *Círculo Feminista de Occidente*.

¹²⁹ Fernández Aceves, *Mujeres En El Cambio Social En El Siglo XX Mexicano*, 209–10.

¹³⁰ Consejo Nacional de Mujeres Mexicanas.

¹³¹ Consejo Feminista de México.

¹³² Macías, *Against All Odds*, 96.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 114.

Feminists in the 1920's were interested in creating international connections. In 1922 Elena Torres, Eulalia Guzman, Luz Vera, Aurora Herrera de Nobregas and Julia Nava de Ruíz Sánchez accepted an invitation to attend the League of Women Voters's annual meeting in Baltimore, United States. This meeting resulted in the formation of the Pan American League for the Elevation of Women. Protestant women joined the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in 1923. Likewise, Elena Arizmendi became the secretary-general of the International League of Iberian and Latin American Women that held a congress in Mexico City in 1925.¹³⁴ Additionally, in 1925 the Association of Mexican University Women, or AMUW was created, linked to the International Federation of University Women (IFUW).¹³⁵ The first AMUW president was the schoolteacher Eva Arce de Rivera Mutio.¹³⁶

From May 10 to 20 in 1923 the Mexican branch of the Pan-American League for the Elevation of Women, or PALEW, held its first congress in Mexico City. This congress, attended mainly by professional women, was promoted by Elena Torres who was PALEW's vice-president for North America.¹³⁷ It had a national character as representatives from at least twenty Mexican states (out of 32) participated. It also had international character, with

¹³⁴ Ibid., 114–5.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 114. The IFUW was founded in 1919 in London by university women from the United States, Great Britain and Canada in the context of the pacifist movement after World War I and the fight for women's suffrage. The idea came from Dean Virginia Gildersleeve of Barnard College (USA), Professor Caroline Spurgeon of the University of London and Rose Sidgwick of the University of Birmingham (England). The association still exists but changed its name to Graduate Women International 'GWI Timeline', *Graduate Women*, accessed 8 May 2016, <http://www.graduatemen.org/who-we-are/our-story/gwi-timeline/>.

¹³⁶ The Association of Mexican University Women was active until at least 1971 and then in 1990 a group of University Women founded the Federación Mexicana Universitaria (Mexican Federation of University Women, or Femu) and re-established links with the IFUW. Gloria Carreño Alvarado, 'La Asociación de Universitarias Mexicanas. Primeros Pasos Para El Empoderamiento Femenino Mediante La Educación Y La Solidaridad.', *Correo Del Maestro. Revista Para Profesores de Educación Básica*, accessed 8 May 2016, http://www.correodelmaestro.com/publico/html5092014/capitulo2/asociacion_de_universitarias_mexicanas.html.

¹³⁷ She was elected in the 1922 first Pan American Conference of Women in Baltimore, Maryland. Macías, *Against All Odds*, 96.

women from different organizations in Cuba and the United States attending the event.¹³⁸ According to Macías, the participation of three socialist representatives of Yucatan was feared by the more moderate delegates of the congress. Yucatan delegates, led by Elvia Carrillo Puerto, discussed topics like female sexuality, birth control, “free love”, sex education in schools, and coeducation, polemic topics at the time. They also condemned conventional marriage as “legal slavery” and proposed solutions for the white slave traffic. They promoted socialist leagues of resistance to bring about social change in Mexico.¹³⁹ The final resolutions of the First Pan-American Women’s Congress, or FPAWC, did not embrace these radical ideas. Birth control was strongly rejected, the women of the FPAWC suggested instead the need to establish pre- and post-natal clinics throughout Mexico to fight against the high infant mortality rates.¹⁴⁰ They rejected “free love” on the grounds that it promoted licentiousness. They disagreed with the term “sexual education” but were in favour of a school program that included biology, hygiene, pre-natal and infant care, eugenics and euthenics.¹⁴¹ The majority of delegates strongly agreed on two points. The first was a single sexual standard for men and women. Regarding this point they criticized inequalities in the Law of Family Relations of 1917.¹⁴² The second was the need for women to vote and run for

¹³⁸ There was at least one representative of the following organizations: the National League for Women Voters, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, the Parent Teachers Association, The YWCA, the Los Angeles’ Council of Catholic Women and the American Birth Control League. Ibid.

¹³⁹ Macías does not explain what socialist leagues of resistance meant for these women. I think it refers to organizations influenced by socialist ideas that wanted to fight for the improvement of peasants and the working class. Ibid., 97.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 97–8.

¹⁴¹ They used these terms, eugenics and euthenics. Euthenics referred to the improvement of human beings through environmental changes.

¹⁴² It established that a divorced man could marry immediately but a divorced woman if “innocent” had to wait 300 days to marry again and if “guilty” two years. It also allowed men to pay the equivalent of five years of support to his ex-wife and then be free of any further obligation. Macías, *Against All Odds*, 98–9.

office, to ensure that their demands were included in the law, and they sent that petition to the Mexican Congress.¹⁴³

Women continued their fight to obtain the right to vote and run for office. Elvia Carrillo Puerto, after her short-lived victory of Yucatan in 1923 when she was elected deputy but could not practice, moved to the state of San Luis Potosi governed by the socialist intellectual Rafael Nieto. Nieto approved a bill that allowed women to vote in state elections, if they were literate and were not members of religious associations. At the end of 1924, Elvia Carrillo Puerto ran for the Chamber of Deputies, with the support of Adalberto Tejeda, the Interior Minister. Elvia won the election with a clear difference but the Permanent Commission in the Chamber of Deputies refused to allow her in the Chamber based on the election law of June 1918 that restricted the right to vote and to hold offices to males.¹⁴⁴ This example and the previous experience in Yucatan leads Macias to affirm that the majority of male revolutionary leaders had “a prejudice against *all* women in politics, not just Catholic women” as was often stated.¹⁴⁵

Catholic women’s activism was very important in the 1920’s. During the Cristiada war (1926-1929) women were active agents. For example, the Association of Catholic Ladies (UDC) maintained links with the National League for Defense of Religious Freedom or LNDLR, which directed the armed rebellion.¹⁴⁶ In 1927 women formed the Women’s Brigades of Saint Joan of Arc or BF.¹⁴⁷ BF women did a variety of activities from raising

¹⁴³ Macías observes that while only radical delegates were in favour of women’s right to vote in the First Feminist Congress of Yucatan in 1916 in this 1923 congress all delegates acknowledged the need for women to have full political rights to influence social change and improve women’s situation. *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 111–2.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁴⁶ Boylan, ‘Gendering the Faith and Altering the Nation’, 205.

¹⁴⁷ Brigadas Femeninas de Santa Juana de Arco.

money and smuggling arms and ammunitions, to providing food, nursing material and information, and even participating in active combat.¹⁴⁸ The BF was condemned by the Holy See because it was a secret organization and it did not fulfil the requisite of having a male supervisor assigned by the Catholic Church. The LNDLR first welcome the BF, but latter fought against BF until the LNDLR achieved that BF got rejected by the Vatican and the Mexican episcopate, which declared BF illegal in December 1928. The dissolution of the BF affected negatively on Cristero's military campaign. Historian Cristina Boylan argues that these women broke the boundaries of what was expected from them by male leaders who feared that women's autonomy and activist participation would "threaten the patriarchal organization of church and home".¹⁴⁹ These fears didn't allow male leaders to acknowledge the effective contribution of BF members to the Cristero war. After the war years women remained very active in Catholic Organizations like Mexican Catholic Women's Union or UFCM¹⁵⁰ and the Association of Young Women Catholics or JCFM.¹⁵¹ By 1934 the JCFM had 102, 491 members and the UFCM had 67,775. Boylan contrast these numbers with the most important organization of women founded in 1934, the Sole Front for Women's Rights or FUPDM, which at its peak moment mobilized some 50,000 women.¹⁵²

In 1927 women achieved that the Civil Code was revised. This code now established in its second article that men and women had the same legal capacity. It allowed married women to take part in civil suits, draw up legal contracts, and acts as guardians. Women

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 206.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 208.

¹⁵⁰ Unión Femenina Católica Mexicana.

¹⁵¹ Juventud Femenina Católica Mexicana.

¹⁵² Boylan, 'Gendering the Faith and Altering the Nation', 210.

could also practice law without restrictions.¹⁵³ The legal age to leave the family home became the same for men and women.¹⁵⁴ The new Civil Code also gave the option to both parties in a marriage to decide if they wanted to administer their property jointly or separately. Even if it introduced progressive changes, the reform of the Civil Code remained incomplete: it did not change the double moral standard that applied to divorce and married women still required their husband's permission to work outside the home.¹⁵⁵

The Great Depression of the 1930's negatively affected the numbers of women working for a wage, which diminished in almost every area of employment with the exception of public administration. The number of women working in the textile industry reduced from 22,961 in 1921 to 8,722 in 1930, according to these years' census records, even if women's population had increased a million in this same period. From 1921 to 1930 the number of women in civil service grew from 614 to 10,122. The increase of women working in public administration led conservatives to express concerns about women taking these jobs. For example, on 29 and 30 November 1933, the conservative and antifeminist newspaper *Excelsior* "suggested that Mexico's leaders follow the example of Mussolini, who had recently ordered that no more than 5 percent of government positions were to be held by women."¹⁵⁶ If Mexican leaders had followed this advice, 30 percent of women working in

¹⁵³ These features were included in the Law of Family relations of 1917 but were not implemented until after the 1927 Civil Code. Macías, *Against All Odds*, 119–21.

¹⁵⁴ In this period in Mexico it could be illegal for sons and daughters to leave the family home if they were not married without their parents' consent. The legal age to leave the family home used to be 21 for men and 30 for women. Salvador Alvarado's Decree no. 167 established the same legal age for independence to men and women in Yucatan in July 1915. *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁵⁵ Frente Único Pro Derechos de la Mujer. *Ibid.*, 119–21.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

government offices would have lost their jobs. In 1933 a male teacher also suggested that pregnant teachers should be dismissed from their posts.¹⁵⁷

In contrast with the feminist movement in the United States, the 1930s were very active years for the feminist movement in Mexico.¹⁵⁸ Women mobilized for better working conditions, jobs and full citizenship. Macías argues that some reasons for the flourishing of feminist activism were that by the 1930's it was clear that the Revolution had not yet lived up to its promise and this motivated peasants, workers and women to mobilise for their causes.¹⁵⁹ Also, in front of the threat of losing the few achievements they had gained, women continued to promote their social and political rights.¹⁶⁰

From 1931 to 1934 women held three Congresses of Women Workers and Peasants or CMOyC,¹⁶¹ the first two in Mexico City and the last one in Guadalajara. María Ríos Cárdenas was a leader in the organization of these congresses.¹⁶² She joined forces with two feminist organizations that appeared at the end of the 1920's, the Feminist Revolutionary Party or PFR¹⁶³ and the National Bloc of Revolutionary Women or BNMR.¹⁶⁴ Their primary end was “to bring together Mexican women of every class, every ideological tendency, and

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 105.

¹⁵⁸ Schneir argues that the 1930s was a period in which the activism of US feminists decreased. Miriam Schneir, 'Introduction', in *Feminism. The Essential Historical Writings*, ed. Miriam Schneir (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xiv.

¹⁵⁹ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 126.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 125–28.

¹⁶¹ Congresos de Mujeres Obreras y Campesinas.

¹⁶² María Ríos Cárdenas founded the monthly feminist journal *Mujer* (Woman) in 1926. She believed women needed to be the actors of their own liberation. *Mujer* publicized articles that were in favour of reform of the Civil Code, world peace, child welfare, juvenile courts, women's full political rights and the creation of a federation of women's organizations. Despite the same last name, she was not a relative of future president of Mexico Lazaro Cárdenas. Ibid., 116–9.

¹⁶³ Partido Feminista Revolucionario.

¹⁶⁴ Bloque Nacional de Mujeres Revolucionarias. Both the PFR and the BNMR formed soon after the creation of the PNR and had a pro-government position. Ibid., 127, 129.

every race to form one unified organization that would pressure the government to recognize and meet the special needs and the special demands of Mexican women.”¹⁶⁵

The first CMOyC took place from 2 to 5 October 1931 and was attended by 600 delegates. The majority of them were professional women “with only a sprinkling of peasants and workers present.”¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the topics they treated were in the interest of women from the countryside and workers. They demanded the implementation of the 8-hour working day and the right of paid maternity leave for women. They also required that peasant women benefited equally with men in land redistribution.¹⁶⁷ President Ortiz Rubio attended the Congress on the second day. Organizer María Ríos Cárdenas used the occasion to talk about the importance of forming a feminist national organization to make women’s problems visible and to solve them. In this congress there was disagreement between the majority of the attendants and the Marxist delegation headed by Concepción Michel and María del Refugio García. Marxists disagreed with María Ríos Cardenas’s idea that a separate women’s organization was needed; in their view women could improve their situation by collaborating in the existing peasant organizations and labour unions.¹⁶⁸

Trying to make the most from the visibility obtained in the first Congress, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Revolution, on 20 November 1931, women from the BNMR presented an initiative to the Chamber of Deputies to grant women full political

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 128.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ In the last session some fourteen women of the Marxist delegation, including Michel, were arrested by government security officers after they denounced the betrayal to ideals of the Revolution by some high officials in Ortiz Rubio government. They were released soon after. Michel changed her view in relation to the need of women’s organizations versus women’s participation in the existing peasant and workers organization and in 1938 published a critic on the Marxist view on women. Ibid., 128–9.

rights. They argued that it was immoral to deny full citizenship to the majority of the population at the same time that they had to follow the law just as men. Against the argument that women should not vote because they would favour Catholic candidates, they pointed out that there were male Catholic representatives in the Chamber and this did not affect men's right to vote.¹⁶⁹ On occasion of the 1932 election, Elvia Carrillo Puerto sent a petition to the Chamber of Deputies to request women's right to vote and to hold office, and on 28 February 1932 she organized a protest for the same cause. None of the petitions or the protest received any official response, but they prove that women were more strongly fighting for their rights.¹⁷⁰

On 25 November 1933 the Second CMOyC started, and participants spoke about the worsening economic condition of women due to the economic depression. Many women in the countryside lacked land, tools, seed and basic services and many women in the city were "reduced to mendacity and prostitution."¹⁷¹ They also denounced how pregnant women were being fired from their jobs. In this context of economic hardship, the delegation of Marxist women grew.¹⁷² There were confrontations between communist delegates and male government agents.¹⁷³ The third and last CMOyC met in Guadalajara from 13 to 15 of September 1934. It was attended by 260 delegates, many of whom from women's workers organizations from the state of Jalisco. Attendants payed special attention to the need to

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 130–1.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 132–3.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁷³ Government agents attended the events of many social organizations, sometimes identified and other times disguised.

enforce the right of paid maternity leave for women workers.¹⁷⁴ In Macías opinion these three congresses were unsuccessful in their attempts to create a national feminist movement; however, they made women's demands visible and showed that women agreed on the topic of achieving full political rights for women.¹⁷⁵ During the Cárdenas administration (1934-1940) women grouped in the FUPDM organized towards this goal. In 1939 a law which granted women the vote was approved but the members of the congress decided not to publish it and therefore the amendment did not enter into force.¹⁷⁶ Women obtained the right to vote and to stand in national elections only in 1953.¹⁷⁷

On 10 June 1934 another important Congress organized by The International League of Iberian and Hispano-American Women or LIMIH took place.¹⁷⁸ The congress was organized by LIMIH's president Celia A. Reyes del Campillo, Leonor Llach and Emilia Rosas Aceves, who invited professional and intellectual women to delve on the issue of prostitution.¹⁷⁹ Del Campillo and Llach were advocates in favour of sex education. Moderate and communist attendants agreed on the need that the state should abolish its policy of regulating brothels, which sanctioned the double sexual standard allowing men to have sexual prerogatives outside of marriage and propitiated the exploitation of women.¹⁸⁰ Catholic

¹⁷⁴ '260 Delegadas Asistieron Al Congreso Nacl. de Obreras Y Campesinas', *El Informador*, 14 September 1934.

¹⁷⁵ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 135.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 137-44

¹⁷⁷ Maxine Molyneux, 'Twentieth-Century State Formations in Latin America', in *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 53.

¹⁷⁸ Liga Internacional de Mujeres Ibéricas e Hispanoamericanas.

¹⁷⁹ María Ríos Cárdenas, *La Mujer Mexicana Es Ciudadana. Historia Con Fisionomía de Una Novela de Costumbres (época 1930-1940)* (Imprenta A. del Bosque, 1942). In Julia Tuñón, ed., *Voces a Las Mujeres. Antología Del Pensamiento Feminista Mexicano, 1873-1953* (México: Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, 2011), 296.

¹⁸⁰ Although they envisioned different strategies to fight against it. Moderates insisted on remedial measures like censorship on obscene books and magazines and to avoid young people from attending films unaccompanied by adults. Communist on the other hand saw that the origin of prostitution was poverty and

women and some male physicians, including those of the Mexican Eugenic Society or SEM, also supported an abolitionist perspective on prostitution.¹⁸¹

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter offers the social and political context in which the sex education proposal was debated. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 allowed for the mobilization of social groups like peasants and workers, who fought for their rights, and obtained significant gains, including the constitution of 1917. The first three decades of the twentieth century also saw an increasing mobilization of women, who had as their most important demands more educational and work opportunities for women, a single moral standard for both sexes and women's legal equality. The Revolution gave women more study and work opportunities, but legal equality was not achieved. Women obtained greater equality in the Civil Code of 1927, but women still had to ask permission to their husbands to work outside the house and a double moral applied for divorce. The double moral standard seemed hard to knock down, for example most women opposed prostitution while the government supported a policy of regulation. Plus, the right to vote and to be elected to office was not achieved in 1930s, although nearly. Both revolutionary men, as demonstrated by the resistance to grant women's legal and political equality, and Catholic men, as shown in the attitude of the LNDLR towards the BF, showed that they did not welcome women's independent participation in political

ignorance and insisted on the need to have equal pay for equal work, sufficient minimum wages and adequate housing. Macías, *Against All Odds*, 136.

¹⁸¹ For Catholic women see: Boylan, 'Gendering the Faith and Altering the Nation', 204–5. For the posture of the SEM on prostitution see: 'Sugestión de La S. Eugénica a Los Padres de Familia', *El Nacional*, 4 August 1933, 7.

life. Also there was a manifest opposition to the entrance of women to paid labour and fears that feminism would masculinize women.

The 1930s were years of political instability for Mexico, the post-revolutionary state was consolidating its institutions. The conflict between the state and Church was one of the most significant in Mexican society in early twentieth century, its most tense moment had just passed; the Cristero War (1926-1929). In the 1930s the secularization of secondary schools, the proposal of sex education and the resolution to adopt socialist education overflowed the fears of Catholic groups who saw these three initiatives as attacking their right to educate their children and to construct a social and political life according to their own values. While the government had the authority and showed some authoritarian traits it lacked social support for some of its policies. The state and some professional men and women that supported its policies and Catholic oriented organizations (formed by men and women as well) took different sides when the sex education initiative was being debated. In these debates actors had other interest apart from the declared one of children's well-being. Each side presented ideal ways to be male and female and ideal forms of sexuality that would serve to support their social and political project, as will be explored further in the following chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 4.

Precedents of sex education in early twentieth century Mexico

This chapter's objective is to discuss the precedents to the first initiative to introduce sex education in public schools at the national level 1932-1934. The topic of sex education did not appear suddenly in the 1930s. In Mexico sex education was being discussed in scientific and left oriented circles since the early twentieth century. In 1910 some Mexican doctors participated in the International Congress of Hygienists in Paris, where the need to implement school-based sex education was discussed. Mexican delegates observed that it was too early for this kind of instruction in Mexico, but they reported that sex education was debated in the Congress to the department of School Hygiene that had sent them.¹ In the State of Yucatan under the revolutionary government of socialist Salvador Alvarado (1915-1918) some important events in this field occurred. First, according to Anna Macias, Alvarado intended to introduce sex education in schools, but due to parental opposition he had to give up this plan.² Second, during his government the First Feminist Congress of Yucatan was held in 1916, in which feminists emerged as promoters of sex education.³ Feminist women and doctors were among the first actors to promote sex education in Mexico, influenced at this time by eugenic ideas. In the next two sections I will concentrate on the development of eugenics in Mexico and its relation with sex education and feminist public interventions regarding sexuality.

4.1. Eugenics and sex education in Mexico

¹ Del Castillo Troncoso, 'La Polémica En Torno a La Educación Sexual', 206.

² Macías, *Against All Odds*, 68, 92.

³ *Ibid.*, 73.

Physicians in the Mexican Eugenic Society (SEM) were among the more active promoters of sex education in Mexico in the early 1930s. Other supporters of sex education that did not belong to the SEM were also influenced by eugenic ideas. As I showed in chapter two, the participation of eugenists in the promotion of sex education was part of a global trend at the time.

Eugenic ideas were debated in Latin America before World War I and were a continuation of debates about evolution, degeneration, progress and civilization important in the nineteenth century.⁴ It was an expert movement composed mainly of physicians and, to a lesser extent, lawyers.⁵ The first eugenics societies in LA were founded in 1918 in Brazil and Argentina.⁶ By the 1920s the language of eugenics made its way into scientific discussions on health.⁷ Eugenics and its scientific language became an alternative to religious views of reality and influenced contemporary visions on medicine, the family, maternity, population criminology and the outcomes of state policy in areas such as public health, social welfare and immigration.⁸

The armed upheaval in Mexico from 1910 to 1917 produced social conditions that favoured the adoption of eugenics in the 1920s.⁹ Among these were the devastation produced

⁴ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 8. On the adoption and development of theories like evolutionism, Lamarckism, physical anthropology, phrenology, ethnology, and studies about heredity in the late nineteenth century Mexico see: Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*. Urías Horcasitas observes how some of these theories were re-taken by the promoters of eugenics and mental hygiene in the first decades of the 20th century.

⁵ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 35–6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 9, 39.

⁹ Eugenic ideas were not received in the vacuum but represented a continuation of ideas like evolutionism and degenerationism that were familiar in Mexican intellectual circles since the late nineteenth century, which showed concern about the construction of race. See for example: Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 15.

by the civil war, and concerns about modernization, urbanization, morality and health in a society that was in the middle of large social transformations.¹⁰ In a world seemingly in chaos, eugenic ideas offered the possibility to improve the qualities of the population in what was perceived as a very competitive world framed in racial terms.¹¹ In Mexico the association of superior traits with the white “race” was manifested in immigration policies that encouraged white immigration.¹²

In Mexico, the first displays of eugenics date from the late 1910s. An example is the Law on Family Relations published by Constitutionalist leader Carranza in April 1917, considered as an advance in the legal conditions of women.¹³ This Code established the social nature of marriage on the interest of the species. Marriage was seen as “the high mission that society and nature put in the spouses: “to propagate the species and found a family.”¹⁴ Due to the social nature of reproduction some individuals should be legally incapacitated from getting married. In this category were “those who had incurable physical impotence, the sick from syphilis, tuberculosis or any other contagious or hereditary

¹⁰ Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 104, 108.

¹¹ The process of racialization promoted by eugenics in Latin America was two ways. According to Stepan on the one hand from the exterior Latina Americans were regarded as “‘tropical,’ ‘backward,’ and racially ‘degenerate.’ Not eugenic in short.” Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics’: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 8. On the other hand Latin American elites perceived themselves as whites and used eugenics ideas to racialize particular populations within each country. *Ibid.*, 44–5.

¹² Similar policies were implemented in other Latin American countries, see: Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics’: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 45. For Mexico, see: Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 44.

¹³ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 76. Tuñón Pablos argues that in this Code reflected the influence that Hermila Galindo’s ideas had over Carranza. In a different line of analysis Macias sees Carranza’s Law on Family Relations as one of the biggest gains of feminist campaigns in the twentieth century including the First Feminist Congress of Yucatan in 1916. Julia Tuñón, ed., *Voces a Las Mujeres. Antología Del Pensamiento Feminista Mexicano, 1873-1953* (México: Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, 2011), 167; Macías, *Against All Odds*, 76.

¹⁴ ‘Ley de Relaciones Familiares Expedida por El C. Venustiano Carranza, 1o Jefe Del Ejecutivo Constitucionalista, Encargado Del Poder Ejecutivo de La Nación’ (Mexico: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1917). In Tuñón, *Voces a Las Mujeres. Antología Del Pensamiento Feminista Mexicano, 1873-1953*, 167. All quotes from sources originally in Spanish are my own translation unless otherwise specified.

incurable or chronic illness as well as the drunk.”¹⁵ The rationale was to avoid that those seen as unable for reproduction would transmit physical or mental weakness to future generations “resulting in damaging the motherland [la patria] whose vigour rest[ed] on the strength of its sons.”¹⁶ The text added that for the purpose of the perfection of the species the natural selection needed to be helped by a “rational and careful artificial selection.”¹⁷ It also implanted by law differentiated gender roles, establishing men as the breadwinners of the family and women as those in charge of directing the home and rearing children. Women’s obligations at home allegedly justified the need for them to ask their husbands permission to work for a wage.¹⁸

Another manifestation of eugenics was the science fiction novel *Eugenia* published by Doctor Eduardo Urzaiz in 1919. Urzaiz was born in Cuba but resided in Yucatan, where he was the rector of the state university and gave some of the first classes on family planning. *Eugenia*, which Macias considers as a profeminist novel,¹⁹ was about a utopian society called Villautopía, “where the relationships between men and women were directed by an omnipresent state that actively intervened in the reproductive lives of its citizens.”²⁰ The fittest men and women had the civic obligation of reproduction and the state assumed the responsibility for children’s rearing and education. Men and women could unite or separate to their wish as long as they were sterilized. Free heterosexual sexuality could be enjoyed at the price of sterilization of the unfit and compulsory reproduction of the fittest. This utopian

¹⁵ Tuñón, *Voces a Las Mujeres. Antología Del Pensamiento Feminista Mexicano, 1873-1953*, 171–2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁹ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 88.

²⁰ Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 103.

society presented a set of morals that broke with the sexual standards established by the middle and upper classes in Porfirian society.²¹

By the 1920s doctors who were early advocates of eugenics in Mexico and who had close connections with men in the governing group helped to introduce eugenic notions such as “forming ‘perfect’ citizens free from the degenerative influence that corrupted society,”²² and the idea that “the creation of an harmonic society rested on racial homogeneity.”²³ Eugenic notions were introduced in the Ministry of Education, or SEP as early as 1921 when a Hygienic Service was established “to improve the physical and mental health of Mexican childhood.”²⁴ It introduced new guidelines regarding nutrition, physical exercise, cleaning and play.

In the 1920s the organization in charge of the health policies, the Departamento de Salubridad Pública (federal Department of Public Health, DSP) was influenced by eugenic ideas. In 1922 the DSP created a school to train nurses, which according to Urías-Horcasitas was a key factor in the diffusion of eugenics in the 1920s. This department also lobbied for the Sanitary Code of 1926 that regulated prostitution and established the obligation of the prenuptial certificate, which required men to prove that they did not have venereal diseases to get married.²⁵ The prenuptial certificate can be seen as the only limitation imposed to the

²¹ The term Porfirian is commonly used in Mexican historiography to refer to the years of Porfirio Díaz regime (1876-1910).

²² *Ibid.*, 107. Accordingly to Urías Horcasitas three doctors that can be considered precursors of eugenic ideas in Mexico are physicians Juan María Rodríguez, who published his works in the *Gaceta Médica de México*, Alfonso Pruneda, closely related to the physical anthropologists of the Museo Nacional and Puig Casauranc, who was secretary of education during Calles regime (1924-1928), that influenced Calles ideas.

²³ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁴ At this time the SEP was divided in three sections: Schools, Libraries and Fine Arts. Hygienic Service was under the School section. *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

sexuality of heterosexual men. In other events, like the Mexican Congress of the Child held in Mexico in 1921, eugenic and sexual issues were debated, including negative eugenics, as participants voted in favour of the sterilization of criminals.²⁶ Besides, Urías-Horcasitas refers to a report directed to Calles written by a doctor who travelled to the Soviet Union about the health system of this country.²⁷ In this report, Urías-Horcasitas observes, the subjects that were in vogue in the Soviet Union coincided with those in the interest of Mexican eugenicists: the care of mothers and children, birth control, prostitution, venereal diseases and abortion.²⁸

These advances of eugenics in education and health institutions were complemented by the creation of the Mexican Eugenic Society for the Improvement of Race or SEM²⁹ in September 1931.³⁰ It was formed by about one hundred members, “doctors and scientifically minded reformers,”³¹ led by Alfredo Saavedra, who was its president until the mid-1950s.³²

²⁶ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 56. According to Suárez the majority of eugenicists in México were in favor of “positive” or preventive eugenics but there were also supporters of “negative” measures that included sterilization. In 1932 in the state of Veracruz a sterilization law was passed but in 1934 sterilization was rejected by Mexican eugenicists in the context of the discussion of the sterilization law in Germany. Suárez y López Guazo, *Eugenesia Y Racismo En México*, 114.

²⁷ Urías Horcasitas refers that this document was found in the archives of Calles in the AGN, but it is incomplete and does not present the name of the author or date, she thinks it was written in the mid 1930’s. As it was directed to Calles it is likely that it was written between 1924 to 1934 (Calles was president of Mexico from 1924-1928 and the one who directed politics of the nation from 1928 to 1934) Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 111. Although I had no access to this document I think it is very likely that this report was done by female physician, Matilde Rodríguez Cabo, who travelled to the USSR commissioned in 1929 by the Mexican government to observe mother-child policies in that country and who was interested on the study of abortion. For Rodríguez Cabo activism on the depenalization of abortion see below in the text. Susana Sosenski and Gregorio Sosenski, ‘En Defensa de Los Niños Y Las Mujeres: Un Acercamiento a La Vida de La Psiquiatra Matilde Rodríguez Cabo’, *Salud Mental* 33, no. 1 (February 2010): 1–10.

²⁸ Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 111.

²⁹ Sociedad Eugénica Mexicana Para el Mejoramiento de la Raza.

³⁰ Suárez y López Guazo, *Eugenesia Y Racismo En México*, 112. Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 113; Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 55.

³¹ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 57.

³² Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 113.

Other outstanding members were Rafael Carrillo, Salvador Bermúdez and Fernando Ocaranza.³³ SEM members were closely related to the governing group. From the 20 founding members five were women: teacher Guadalupe Cejudo, physician Margarita Delgado Solis, lawyer Gloria Mejia, Ms. Isabel Ivanoff and Esperanza Peña Monterrubio.³⁴ Other active women eugenists were physicians Matilde Rodríguez Cabo, Ofelia Domínguez Navarro and Antonia Urzúa. Other women, Bertha Riveroll, Emilia Lejía, Paz Ibarra, Guadalupe Álvarez, Esperanza Cano and Susana Solano (Peruvian) were included in the *Boletín* SEM published.³⁵ According to Stepan the SEM was among the two most important eugenic organizations of Latin America in the 1930s.³⁶ The SEM had an early precedent in the Eugenics section of the Sociedad Mexicana de Puericultura (Mexican Society of Childcare, SMP), founded in 1929. This section was devoted to issues of heredity, illness related to reproduction, infantile sexuality, sexual education and birth control, and as Stepan notices, these were “radical ideas of its time and place.”³⁷ Stepan reasons that the relatively late development of a eugenic society in Mexico was in part caused by the social and political unrest caused by the revolution.³⁸ While Stepan’s observation makes sense, it is also important to highlight that by the 1930’s when the SEM formed in Mexico City, eugenic ideas had been circulating for a considerable period and were being seriously considered by officials in charge of drawing policies.

³³ Suárez y López Guazo, *Eugenesia Y Racismo En México*, 113.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 264. Stepan points that this initial inclusion of women in the SEM did not grow at the same pace that the organization showing the limitations of professional education for Mexican women. Stepan, *‘The Hour of Eugenics’: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 109–110.

³⁵ Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 147.

³⁶ Stepan, *‘The Hour of Eugenics’: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 55.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Beatriz Urías-Horcasitas in her study of racism in Mexico notes that eugenics was connected to the intention of the state to create a new ideal citizen that she describes as a “new man.”³⁹ The “new man” the revolutionary governments conceptualized “would be free from addictions, like alcoholism, would be a honest worker and a good father, he would be freed from religious fanaticism and ... he would be an active element to assimilate and promote the new secular, nationalistic and civic religion, promoted by the state.”⁴⁰ This project of the “new man” was especially directed at the working and rural population. Urías-Horcasitas study of racism in Mexico and its connection with the developments of social and medical sciences and state policies is path-breaking and thoroughly researched, nevertheless it often misses a gender perspective.⁴¹ I argue that it was not only the “new man” that was actively being constructed by state policies and ideologies but also the “new woman” and the way men and women should relate to each other to produce an ideal society. Eugenists in the 1920s and 1930s were important in the redefinition of gender, as they used the language of

³⁹ Two important trends that contributed to creating this “new man” in Mexico according to Urías were, indigenismo, that could be defined as a group of policies that were directed towards indigenous people and that aimed at both studying indigenous populations and promoting their integration to Mexican society and culture through miscegenation and acculturation; and mental hygiene, that was an association of eugenics and psychiatry. Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 32. Other political projects in the world sought in their own way to create a “new man”. Some examples are: fascisms in Italy, National Socialism in Germany, bolshevism in the USSR, and the regimes of Franco in Spain, Salazar in Portugal and Vichy in France, and the pedagogy of rationalist schools inspired in the ideas of Francisco Ferrer Guardia in Spain. *Ibid.*, 23, 27.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 19–20.

⁴¹ For example, two of the quotes that she offers in her discussion of the “new man” include a mention to women, but in her analysis only a universal category of the “new man” is offered. *Ibid.*, 32, 34. This case resembles, what has been criticized by the United States gender and education scholar Jane Roland Martin, of how the study of Rousseau’s book *Emile*, has most of the time forgotten the fifth section of the book dedicated to the education of Sophie, as a universal of all girls, that actually contradicts Rousseau’s model of education based on “nature” and allows to see how this “nature” is actually produced in both the case of Emile, the supposed universal of all boys, and Sophie. Martin highlights the fact that Rousseau’s model for boys has been regarded as the universal for both boys as girls in contrast with what was stated by the author in the often ignored fifth section of the book. Jane Roland Martin, ‘Sophie Y Emile: Estudio de Un Caso de Prejuicio Sexista En La Historia Del Pensamiento Educativo’, *Educación Y Sociedad*, Madrid, no. 1 (1983): 127–46.

science to assign proper roles for men and women and ideas of sex differentiation and sexual “deviation.”⁴²

The national state in consolidation in Mexico during the 1920s and the 1930s showed particular interest in improving the habits and bodies of its population. Ideas of “racial uniformity” and “deputation”⁴³ became central to the nationalism in formation. As shown by the rhetoric of the “new man” the state embarked in a series of policies that aimed at modernizing the mentalities, habits and everyday ways of life of larger groups of the population in Mexico, in a process that is known as the “cultural revolution” in which educative policies played a central role.⁴⁴ Population and health policies that promoted demographic growth from a social and economic perspective were also important for the Mexican state in the 1930s.⁴⁵ These policies that aimed at modifying the conduct of individuals for both their own well-being and that of the community embody what Michel Foucault conceptualized as biopower.

In this context of policies that aimed at regulating and transforming the private lives of individuals for both their own well-being and that of the nation, is that the proposal for sex education emerged in the early 1930s. Sex education was not the only policy that sought the creation of new habits but it was particular because it was directed to regulate the sexual lives of citizens through the diffusion of scientific knowledge or discourses and due to the strong resistance that it provoked. Education policies were key in modifying the conduct of

⁴² Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 12–3; Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*, 9, 19.

⁴³ Urías refers to the term “depuración racial” (racial deputation) as one of the objectives that the projects of indigenism, eugenics, mental hygiene, biotypology and the theory of social defence wanted to achieve in Mexico. Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 36.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 35-6, 107.

people. As historian Mary Kay Vaughan demonstrates in her study of rural education in Mexico from 1930 to 1940, the state intended to modify customs and beliefs that were seen as an obstacle for achieving progress.⁴⁶ Some of these changes were directed at the family and included a gender perspective. The intention was to redefine gender roles, but not in a radical way, which Vaughan terms as “modernization of patriarchy.” A new masculinity that embodied the ideals of the “new man” was promoted.⁴⁷ This model of sanitized and national masculinity was stimulated through the SEP programs and cultural activities, such as plays, poems and flyers. The “new man” should enjoy non-violent sports like basketball and baseball that promoted health, cooperation and competition. SEP programs also aimed to curb what was seen as man’s “excessive and irrational control over his wife and children.”⁴⁸ For this purpose SEP encouraged that women schoolteachers created networks with the peasants’ wives to promote scientific, hygienic and healthier ways of reproduction and to prepare “women for participation in the modern world as more autonomous social subjects.”⁴⁹ Though these changes were not radical they aimed at promoting a more “civilized” way of life, with all its components of health, hygiene and education. In doing so the state actively restructured gender relations.

4.2. Feminist interventions on sexuality issues

In 1916 Hermila Galindo surprised the audience at the First Feminist Congress of Yucatán with her speech “La mujer en el porvenir” (the woman in the future).⁵⁰ Galindo was the first

⁴⁶ Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 29.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁰ It is important to notice that ‘La mujer en el porvenir’, was not read by Galindo herself in the Congress but by Cesar A. González from the education department. Macías, *Against All Odds*, 73. I do not know what the reasons were for Galindo’s absence to the congress.

woman to promote sex education for girls and this lecture is one of the few documents I could find in which a woman develops her ideas in favour of sex education. Galindo's ideas were influential in the Mexican feminist movement of the 1920s and 1930s.⁵¹ In "La mujer en el porvenir," Galindo focused on what she called women's sexual instinct. She linked this sexual instinct to maternal love, which in her view was related to the conservation of the species, thus "it was superior to all affections, to all passions."⁵² Galindo viewed maternity as a political mission. She declared that women were men's companions and equals, and for these reasons women should participate actively in politics. Even if women could not vote at the moment, they could influence politics from the home. Galindo declared that: "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."⁵³ In her view a woman free of prejudices and who identified with the interests of the Nation would raise better citizens. In "La mujer en el porvenir," Galindo argued that sexual instinct "was so strong in women... that no hypocrite artifice is able to destroy, modify or restrain it."⁵⁴ Galindo advocated for sex education for girls in secondary schools that should include knowledge in anatomy, physiology and hygiene. She regretted the attitude of some mothers who didn't talk about these topics with their daughters because they did not want "to open the girls' eyes."⁵⁵ Galindo considered these mothers as responsible for the "degeneration of race" because "that lymphatic, nervous

⁵¹ Ibid., 34.

⁵² Tuñón, *Voces a Las Mujeres. Antología Del Pensamiento Feminista Mexicano, 1873-1953*, 186–7.

⁵³ Hermila Galindo, 'Laboremos', *La Mujer Moderna*, 16 September 1915. In Ibid, 164.

⁵⁴ Tuñón, *Voces a Las Mujeres. Antología Del Pensamiento Feminista Mexicano, 1873-1953*, 187. Margaret Sanger also expressed that the "feminine spirit" or feminine sexuality was a strong force of nature that motivated women to be themselves. Women, Sanger argued, needed to be in charge to decide over that energy, which meant to have control over when they wanted to be mothers and how many children they wanted to have. Teresa Ortiz Gómez, 'El "Espíritu Femenino" Y La Libertad Sexual En La Obra de Margaret Sanger', in *Impulsando La Historia Desde La Historia de Las Mujeres: La Estela de Cristina Segura*, ed. Pilar Díaz Sánchez, Gloria Franco Rubio, and María Fuente Pérez (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2012), 469–74.

⁵⁵ Tuñón, *Voces a Las Mujeres. Antología Del Pensamiento Feminista Mexicano, 1873-1953*, 188.

and shy woman cannot give vigorous children to the homeland.”⁵⁶ She also quoted John Stuart Mill to advocate for a rational and physical education for women. In Galindo’s view, the repression of the sexual instinct could lead to illness or madness. According to Laura Orellana, “La mujer en el porvenir” also refers to August Bebel’s famous book.⁵⁷ Galindo, as many men of her time, viewed sexual differentiation as an ideal. Therefore one of the dangers of not freely expressing the sexual instinct according to “natural laws” was the opposite: men could become feminine and women masculine in form and character.⁵⁸ Galindo concluded that “all human beings should have not only the right, but the power and even the duty to satisfy instincts that are connected in the most intimate way to their essence.”⁵⁹ She observed that due to social norms the sexual instinct for women could only be satisfied in marriage, a situation she judged as a “dreadful problem.”⁶⁰ Galindo argued that there was a decrease in marriages in part due to prostitution,⁶¹ she described prostitutes as victims and criticized the authorities for allowing women’s exploitation from which some men, including foreigners, profited a lot.⁶² She invited thinkers, statesmen and revolutionary legislators to find a solution to this “dreadful problem” that could bring the worse evil for a nation, namely “the decrease of the population and the degeneration of race.”⁶³

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Laura Orellana Trinidad, “‘La Mujer Del Porvenir’ Raíces Intelectuales Y Alcances Del Pensamiento Feminista de Hermila Galindo, 1915-1919’, *Signos Históricos*, no. 5 (June 2001): 121–132.

⁵⁸ Hermila Galindo, “‘La Mujer En El Porvenir’”, Primer Congreso Feminista de Yucatán, Enero de 1916’, *Ideas Feministas de Nuestra América*, n.d., <https://ideasfem.wordpress.com/textos/f/f13/>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Tuñón, *Voces a Las Mujeres. Antología Del Pensamiento Feminista Mexicano, 1873-1953*, 189.

⁶¹ Ibid., 186.

⁶² Galindo, “‘La Mujer En El Porvenir’”.

⁶³ Tuñón, *Voces a Las Mujeres. Antología Del Pensamiento Feminista Mexicano, 1873-1953*, 190.

Galindo criticized the double moral standards for men and women. She explained that in case of a sexual encounter out of marriage, men were praised and they would disclose their story proudly, like *Don Juan Tenorio*, while the “wretched woman who has not done anything else but to fulfil one of the exigencies of her instinct, which is not denied to the most despicable female animal, society looks down on her, she sees her future truncated and she is thrown to the abyss of hopelessness, misery, madness or suicide.”⁶⁴ Galindo also indicated that this situation led women to desperate solutions like abortion or infanticide.⁶⁵

Galindo in her speech made a connection between the double moral standard, women’s sexuality, the decrease of the population and the perceived degeneration of the “race.” She framed her argument within the social and scientific knowledge of the time and her thoughts were close to the concerns of the revolutionary governments about the Mexican population. Nevertheless, her mention of the sexual instinct in the woman as something derived from nature was considered scandalous and she was referred to as an immoral woman, although her ideas were similar to these expressed by well-known thinkers like Bebel.⁶⁶

Contraception was promoted in the revolutionary and feminist setting of Yucatan.⁶⁷ In 1922 some 15 thousand copies of a translation of Margaret Sanger’s⁶⁸ *Family Limitation*

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Orellana Trinidad, “La Mujer Del Porvenir” *Raíces Intelectuales*, 121.

⁶⁷ Although contraception was promoted by some women that identified as feminists it is also important to consider that contraception was not advocated by all feminist at the time. See Chapter 3, section 3.3., for the development of women’s demands in early twentieth century Mexico.

⁶⁸ Sanger was born in New York in 1879 to a working-class Irish Catholic Family. Sanger was an activist for women’s right to decide about their reproductive lives. She defied many times the US Comstock Laws that prohibited the diffusion of any knowledge on contraception. Sanger wrote *Family Limitation* in 1914. Cathy Moran Hajo, ‘Birth Control in 1920s Mexico’, *Margaret Sanger Papers Project*, 10 October 2012,

were printed by Governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto (1922-1924) and distributed among schoolteachers and officials in charge of civil marriage.⁶⁹ It presented the available contraception methods, like douches, sponges, pessaries, diaphragm, condoms, and coitus interruptus.⁷⁰ It also supported the idea that women had the same right as men to sexual pleasure. Sanger's ideas were framed in the eugenic language of the period.⁷¹ There was opposition to the promotion of contraception in Yucatan, for example a Catholic organization called The Knights of Columbus asked the Attorney General to ban the pamphlet, but they were not successful.⁷² After Alvarado's assassination in 1924, feminists' ideas, including contraception, lost the official support.

Contraception remained polemic issue in many parts of the country. An incident in the Gabriela Mistral's Vocational School studied by historian Patience Schell proves both the diffusion of knowledge about contraception in the early 1920s and its polemic nature. In the summer of 1922 a professor, Dolores Angeles Castillo Lara, was accused by one of her students of teaching Sanger's pamphlet in her civics classes. Although Castillo Lara declared

<https://sangerpapers.wordpress.com/2012/10/10/birth-control-in-1920s-mexico/>; Macías, *Against All Odds*, 92–3.

⁶⁹ The translated version was called *La regulación de la natalidad o la brújula del hogar* (Birth control, or the compass of the home).

⁷⁰ Jon Knowles, 'Margaret Sanger- Heroína Del Siglo XX', trans. Susana Petit and Cohen, Judith, *Informe. Planned Parenthood Federation of America*, 2009, 4. By 1922, when the Spanish version of Family Planning was published, Sanger was a celebrity in the United States and had travelled around the world to learn about contraception and to promote her ideas. *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷¹ Knowles, 'Margaret Sanger- Heroína Del Siglo XX', 6–7. The character of the relationship of Sanger with eugenics is ambivalent, to this respect Stern wrote: Margaret Sanger "has been alternatively described as a die-hard eugenicist with virulent race and class prejudices or as a true if misguided feminist who cultivated strategic alliances with eugenicists but did not fully accept the implications of their ideas. Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*, 8.

⁷² Alvarado's support of her booklet *Family Limitation* made Sanger happy. In 1923 she received an invitation by Carrillo Puerto to visit Yucatán. In her place Mrs. Anne Kenedy, executive Secretary of the National Council of American Birth Control League visited Yucatan in August 1923 and plans were made to establish birth control clinics. Moran Hajo, 'Birth Control in 1920s Mexico'; Alexander Sanger, 'Anniversary of Spanish-Language Publication of Family Limitation', 25 January 2016, <https://sangerpapers.wordpress.>; Macías, *Against All Odds*, 92.

her innocence about the diffusion of contraception, she professed her support for other feminist ideas, for example that women should be publicly active, that one day women and men would be equal and that divorce was better than “to put up with a husband’s humiliation.”⁷³ The accusation led to a scandal, in part because vocational schools were supposed to educate women into morality and how to be better mothers based on new scientific ideas, in a context in which the state promoted women’s reproductive role. As Schell puts it: “[i]f women could choose not to be mothers, it threatened the very future of the nation.”⁷⁴

In the 1930’s there was a group of women doctors that promoted the depenalization of abortion. These women, Matilde Rodríguez Cabo, Ofelia Domínguez Navarro and Esther Chapa, wanted to include abortion in health policies and urged the state to provide contraceptives to women in all social classes. They identified as Marxist and the first two were also active in the eugenic movement. Other active communist women backed the initiative, for example Refugio García and Esperanza Balmaceda.⁷⁵ They referred to the experience with legalized abortion in the USSR, in fact, doctor Rodríguez Cabo visited this country commissioned by the Mexican Government in 1929 to study the situation of health protection for women and children her report included information about abortion.⁷⁶ In 1936 physician Domínguez Navarro sent a paper to the Penal Unification Convention entitled

⁷³ Schell, ‘Gender Class, and Anxiety at the Gabriela Mistral Vocational School’, 122.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁷⁵ Gabriela Cano, ‘Introducción Y Selección: “Una Perspectiva Del Aborto En Los Años Treinta, La Propuesta Marxista”’, *Debate Feminista*, year 1, no. 1 (September 1990): 372–3.

⁷⁶ Ofelia Domínguez Navarro, ‘El Aborto Por Causas Sociales Y Económicas’, *Debate Feminista* year 1, no. 2 (September 1990): 379. This paper was written in 1936 and published in 1990 with an introduction by Gabriela Cano. See previous note.

“Abortion for social and economic reasons” in which she argued against the penalization of abortion in the Civil Code, because she considered it against the revolutionary ideals of the government.⁷⁷

4.3. Conclusion

Since the late 1910s, eugenic ideas circulated in Mexico, and during the 1920s, they were integrated in policies of health and education that aimed at improving the bodies of citizens, which can be seen as a biopolitical project directed by the state. These policies, as exemplified by Vaughan study of rural education, had a gender aspect as they promoted particular ways to be male and female. Also eugenic and feminist ideas put sexuality on the agenda of national politics demanding an intervention of the state in these issues. The initiative of sex education in the 1930s can be seen as a continuation of this state attempt to intervene in the life of citizens through the diffusion of scientific ideas –discourses –that would help the state to promote a different morality, away from the one promoted by the Catholic Church, which was one of the strongest state opponents in the realization of its political and cultural project.

⁷⁷ The penal Code of 1931 penalized women who had an abortion and those who helped her. This regulation included a moralist criteria. In its article 331, for example that the sentence would be reduced if women had an honourable reputation, she had concealed her pregnancy and if it was the result of an illegitimate union. Ibid., 375. . In the 1990s abortion remained illegal in Mexico despite the fights of feminist during the 1970s for the legalization of abortion. Cano, ‘Introducción Y Selección: “Una Perspectiva Del Aborto En Los Años Treinta, La Propuesta Marxista”’, 371. It was not until 2007 and only in Mexico City that the right for abortion was granted to women in México. Leticia Bonifaz Alonso, ‘Prólogo’, in *La Regulación de La Natalidad O La Brujula Del Hogar. Medios Seguros Y Científicos Para Evitar La Concepción, 1922*, Reimpresión 2016 (Mérida: Servicios Humanitarios en Salud Sexual y Reproductiva, 2016), 8.

Chapter 5.

The 1932-1934 initiative on sex education, development and actors

This chapter's objective is to reconstruct the history of the first initiative to introduce sex education in public schools at the national level in Mexico in 1932-1934. These years mark when the SEP began the discussion of sex education in 1932 and when the initiative was forfeited in 1934. In this chapter I identify the actors that entered the debate, and I will outline their main arguments, interests and alliances. I will also reflect on the difficulties that the implementation of sex education encountered.

5.1. First steps towards the implementation of sex education and the emergence of actors

Both Mexico's participation in the 1930 Pan American Child Congress and the 1932 SEM studies presented to the SEP¹ are recognized as precedents of the initiative.² However, the input of women in the promotion of sex education has not received attention in previous historiography.³ Historian Stepan reported that women in the National Bloc of Revolutionary Women, or BNMR, in Mexico City petitioned Minister Bassols for the introduction of sex education in technical schools. Women in the BNMR also suggested asking the SEM for advice in a plan of action.⁴ Also, professional women in the health sector, which met at the

¹ The names of the studies were: "Bases para la educación sexual en nuestro medio," (Basis for sex education in our midst); "Bases para la implantación de la Educación Sexual en las escuelas secundarias" (Basis for the implementation of sex education in secondary schools) and "Programa de un curso de educación sexual para estudiantes de la índole de escuelas técnicas industriales y comerciales", (Program of a sex education course for students of the nature of industrial technical schools and commercial). Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*, 3.

² These precedents were explained in the Introduction.

³ See Chapter 2.

⁴ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics': Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 130.

First Congress of Nurses and Midwives,⁵ or PCEP, on January 1933, declared themselves in favour of sex education. Their spokesperson was physician Celia A. Reyes del Campillo.⁶ Women in the PCEP were active lobbyists for the discussion and implementation of sex education.

Minister Narciso Bassols turned the SEM's studies to the Advisory Technic Commission,⁷ or CTC, inside the SEP formed by physicians Pedro de Alba and Alfonso Pruneda; Professors Cesar A. Ruiz, Miss Dionisia Zamora, Gildardo F. Avilés, David Vilchis and Ramón García Ruiz; lawyer Ezequiel A. Chávez and Engineer León Salinas.⁸ This commission issued a report to Bassols in October 1932.⁹ Of the members of this commission, three were of particular importance: Pruneda, Chávez and Vilchis. Pruneda was a recognized physician and teacher, a pioneer of eugenics in Mexico, rector of the National University from 1924-1928,¹⁰ member of the SEP's CTC from 1932-1951 and permanent secretary of the National Medicine Academy, or ANM.¹¹ Chávez was an outstanding professor who wrote prolifically about the history of education and educational issues in Mexico, introduced the study of ethics and psychology in the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, and with Franz Boas founded the Escuela Internacional de Arqueología y Etnología in 1911. Chávez served twice as rector of the National University, and in 1928 wrote a book about the psychology of

⁵ In Spanish, Primer Congreso de Enfermeras y Parteras.

⁶ 'Implantación de Cursos de Higiene Y de Moral Sexual En Las Escuelas', *El Nacional*, 10 January 1933, BPEJ, 1.

⁷ Comisión Técnica Consultiva

⁸ 'La Educación Sexual Y El Lic. Bassols.'

⁹ 'Dolosa Interpretación Del Dictamen Acerca de La Educación Sexual', 4 June 1933.

¹⁰ The National University (Universidad Nacional de México) changed its name in 1929, to its current one, National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico) or UNAM in 1929.

¹¹ 'Alfonso Pruneda', *Diccionario de Historia de La Educación En México*, accessed 12 July 2016, http://biblioweb.tic.unam.mx/diccionario/htm/biografias/bio_p/pruneda.htm; Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 107.

teenagers.¹² Days after the publication of the report Chávez declared he was not able to attend the CTC meetings and therefore he did not support its conclusions, giving the opposition a strong argument against validity of the report.¹³ Vilchis was a teacher who had been affected by Bassols's measures to reorganize the relationship between teachers and the SEP, which intended to limit the power of union leaders.¹⁴ Vilchis later joined the protests against sex education.¹⁵

The CTC report was made public from the 24 to 27 May 1933, in national newspapers including the pro-government newspaper *El Nacional*. The CTC reviewed the SEM's suggestions but arrived at its own conclusions.¹⁶ Bassols' foreword to the report stated that the SEP's intention was to explore and orientate society's opinions on the subject because it would be useless and even damaging "to have the best sex education within a hostile environment."¹⁷ From this initial declaration, one can argue he expected a positive response

¹² 'Ezequiel A. Chávez', *Diccionario de Historia de La Educación En México*, 12 July 2016, http://biblioweb.tic.unam.mx/diccionario/htm/biografias/bio_c/chavez_eze.htm.

¹³ 'Una Cuestion Que Se "Enroncha"', *Excélsior*, 6 June 1933, sec. Editorial.

¹⁴ Bassols policies included the restructuring of the Consejo de Educación Primaria del D. F. (Mexico City Primary School Board, or CEPDF), this board had the twofold mission to study technical problems and to represent teachers. In 1932 Bassols took out the second function and converted it into a technical board with the consequent loss of power of the leaders of the CEPDF who lost their positions as new members were elected. Before the reform the president of the CEPDF was David Vilchis and his secretary Lino Santacruz. Bassols also restructured the system of salaries and promotion of teachers (escalafón) limiting the influence that union leaders used to have in these decisions. Bassols wanted to promote a fairer system but as it affected the interests of union leaders it was the source of conflict between teachers' leaders and Bassols. Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México I*, 73–96.

¹⁵ During Cárdenas administration (1934-1940), Vilchis played an important role in the unification of teachers' unions as part of the Confederación de Trabajadores de México. *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁶ For example the SEM proposed that sex education should be given by partents but the SEP determined that it was the responsibility of teachers. The SEM also wanted to change the festivity on 12 October from the "Day of the race" as it was called for "Day of American Eugenics," –which was rejected by the SEP. Nevertheless the report was very much influence by the eugenic ideas that were common in Mexico. 'La Educación Sexual Y El Lic. Bassols.', 5; 'La Educación Sexual Debe Establecerse', 1–2.

¹⁷ 'La Educación Sexual Y El Lic. Bassols.', 1. All quotes from sources originally in Spanish are my own translation unless otherwise specified.

to sex education. The CTC established that in “the modern educative world, sex education [was] considered a necessary action to secure the normal and total development of the [child’s] sexual instinct.”¹⁸ The CTC asked four questions: 1. Why should sex education be given? 2. Who should give it? 3. When should it be given? 4. And how? They answered them in the following way: 1. Sex education was necessary because children had the right to know about the origins of life. They were against the practice of silence that in their view was the cause of the acquisition of bad personal habits, venereal diseases, the immorality of youth and a great number of girls entering prostitution. 2. They declared that in a civilized society the task of sex education belonged to the parents, as argued by the SEM, but that in the Mexican society where ignorance and religious prudishness were so common, parents had proved not to be able to provide it. In their view sex education was the responsibility of teachers over parents and physicians. Physicians, the CTC argued, sometimes lacked the time or the pedagogical abilities. 3. About the time of implementation the CTC argued it had to start from the elementary school due to several reasons. First, students in fifth and sixth grade were sometimes adolescents. Second, a great number of students did not continue to secondary education. Third, they consider giving sex education only in secondary schools would be “TOO LATE.”¹⁹ 4. About how this instruction should be given, the CTC reasoned that in elementary schools it should be part of biology classes and should be objective, based on real facts and taught in a scientific way. In secondary schools, sex education should contain notions of anatomy and hygiene. The CTC suggested to adapt the content to the social conditions of the school, deciding on including or not notions of venereal diseases and “sexual pathologies.” The objective was to secure the “correct” development of the sexual

¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁹ Ibid.

instinct and sexual conduct. This sex education was also gendered. For boys it should contribute “to raising that kind of devotion to the opposite sex, which is characteristic of cultured societies.”²⁰ And for girls, it should promote “that modesty and that respect of themselves, which is the first reason of their prestige in front of the other sex.”²¹ The CTC was against coeducation for teenagers. They also maintained that women teachers, especially young women, should not give sex education to groups of boys, in these cases the male principal should assume the task.²² An important component in the classes for girls since third grade was puericulture, a branch of eugenics that specialized on children’s upbringing. In the view of the CTC, eugenics would take a renewed importance within sex education. The CTC defined eugenics as the science that indicates the rules for the physical improvement of the individual before birth,²³ and suggested that lectures would be given in secondary schools about the importance of eugenics and the improvement of the “race.”²⁴ In their conclusion, the CTC established that sex education was necessary and that it was the SEP’s responsibility to organize it in Mexico, including the instruction of teachers to prepare them for this important mission. The CTC also suggested to organize talks for teenagers who did not attend school and emphasized the need to create schools for “morally abnormal children.”²⁵

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² ‘Las Ventajas de La Coeducacion Y Sus Peligros’, *El Nacional*, 25 May 1933, 8. It is interesting they assumed that the principal had to be a man. In many schools the principal was a woman.

²³ ‘La Educación Sexual Debe Establecerse’, 1.

²⁴ ‘La Educación Sexual Y Su Implantación’, *El Nacional*, 26 May 1933, 1.

²⁵ The SEP’s Department of Psycho-pedagogy and Hygiene should play an important role training teachers for sex education and organizing lectures and schools for “abnormal children”. ‘La Educación Sexual Debe Establecerse’, 1–2. The term “abnormal children” was widely used in the 1930s and 1940s Mexico. For example, physician Alfonso Contreras in a study about the effects of alcoholism in heredity explained that the category “abnormal children” included, “idiots,” epileptics, deformed and “perverts”. Alfonso Contreras, ‘Alcoholismo Y Descendencia’, *Eugenesia* 2, no. 21 (July 1941): 10–13. Quoted in: Suárez y López Guazo, *Eugenesia Y Racismo En México*, 163. It was also the term used for children who required psychiatric treatment. See: Sosenski and Sosenski, ‘En Defensa de Los Niños Y Las Mujeres’. In the context of the sex

Women in PCEP organized a pluralistic commission to study the implementation of sex educations in public schools. It was formed by representatives of different institutions and social organizations: physicians Alfonso Pruneda (SEP), Manuel Guevara Oropeza (Health Department), Everardo Landa (ANM), Santiago Ramirez (UNAM), Adrian Correa (SEM) and Celia Reyes del Campillo, (PCEP permanent commission); Mrs. María Gargollo de Lazo (Youth Red Cross), Mrs. Amelia V. de Rios (Mexico City Parent's Association Federation, or FAPF),²⁶ Lawyer Ignacio Bravo Betancourt and Physician Antonio Sordo Noriega, (National Parent's Union, or UNPF),²⁷ journalist Gonzalo Báez-Camargo, known as Pierre/Pedro Gringoire; Mr. Pastor Rocha, (Secondary School Teachers' National Association),²⁸ Mr. Guillermo G. Ibarra (National Students Confederation).²⁹ The PCEP also organized a congress on sex education in July 1933 in coordination with the Medicine University to celebrate the University's one hundredth anniversary.³⁰ The two mentioned parents' associations FAPF and UNPF, plus the National Association for the Freedom of Teaching,³¹ or ANPLE, played an important role in the protests against sex education. The UNPF and the ANPLE defended the right to teach religion in private schools and were active

education debate, physician Federico Ortiz explained that when a child performed "obscene acts," referring to autoerotism, teachers should not reprehend he/she in a harsh way, but rather should encourage the kid to do other activities, but that if the child reoffended he/she should be send to the medical department to determine if "abnormality" existed. When "abnormality" was declared doctors would recommend parents a special hygiene and diet for the child, a loving surveillance and regimes of rest, hydrotherapy and surgical interventions (which he does not specify the type). Federico Ortiz Armengol, '¿Qué Es La Educación Sexual?', *El Nacional*, 16 August 1933, sec. Editorial, 3.

²⁶ Federación de Agrupaciones de Padres de Familia del D.F.

²⁷ Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia.

²⁸ Asociación Mexicana de Profesores de Escuelas Secundarias.

²⁹ 'Dolosa Interpretación Del Dictamen Acerca de La Educación Sexual'.

³⁰ By this time the PCEP had created its own union. 'Convocatoria Para Un Congreso Sobre Educación Sexual', *El Nacional*, 18 July 1933, 1–2.

³¹ Asociación Nacional Pro Libertad de Enseñanza.

against the implementation of the regulatory legislation of constitutional articles 3 and 130.³²

The FAPF was a recent creation, and according to historian Del Castillo was created by the government to counteract the influence of the UNPF.³³

5.2. Debates, protests and plebiscites about sex education

After the publication of the CTC report, heated debates on the topic unfolded in national newspapers and arguments for and against sex education proliferated.³⁴ The UNPF was the most active organization against sex education. Its leadership was middle-class and it was linked to the Catholic hierarchy.³⁵ As early as 30 May 1933 the UNPF published a response to the CTC's report, which included the arguments that would characterize their position in the following debates. They considered that sex education was dangerous and that it would lead to the moral corruption of children, which is why they defended that only parents should give this kind of instruction.³⁶ Bravo-Betancourt, UNPF president, argued that human life had existed some ten thousand years and that if all this time humanity could do without sex education, this showed it was not necessary. He refuted the argument that sex education was needed to prevent hereditary defects, "degeneration" and "perversions." In his view the number of individuals affected by these conditions was minimal and the damage that sex

³² Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, 184–90. See Chapter 3, section 3.2., for a description of the conflict related to the implementation of these articles. The UNPF was created in 1917 with the name Asociación Nacional de Padres de Familia. They changed their name in 1926 to UNPF. The ANPLE was of latter creation probably in 1933 and was an elite organization composed by businessmen and professionals. María Guadalupe García Alcaraz, 'La Participación de Los Padres de Familia En La Educación, Siglos XIX Y XX', *Diccionario de Historia de La Educación En México*, accessed 28 July 2016, http://biblioweb.tic.unam.mx/diccionario/htm/articulos/sec_9.htm.

³³ Del Castillo states that in 1929 the SEP decided the creation of the FAPF and in 1933 regulated its participation. Del Castillo Troncoso, 'La Polémica En Torno a La Educación Sexual', 206.

³⁴ In Chapter 6, I will analyse the arguments of advocates and in Chapter 7, those of the opposition.

³⁵ Del Castillo Troncoso, 'La Polémica En Torno a La Educación Sexual', 214.

³⁶ Ignacio Bravo Betancourt, 'Es Adversa La Opinión de Los Padres a La Educación Sexual Impartida Por Los Profesores', *Excelsior*, 30 May 1933, 7.

education would produce was immense. Bravo-Betancourt argued that if a child lost his/her innocence, “not even God could bring it back.”³⁷ Bravo-Betancourt declared he would not describe what sex education was, but assured that the only who had the natural right to give it were parents, not doctors or teachers. Bravo-Betancourt resented the fact that there was a recent effort to make doctors the only authority in terms of sex education. Concerning teachers, he said that if they needed special preparation, that would mean that they were unqualified. Instead of preparing teachers he suggested preparing parents. He was especially against sex education given in groups as he assured this would lead to students losing their respect for each other. In their arguments the UNPF was following pope Pius XI’s encyclical letter *Divini Illius Magistri*.³⁸ Bravo-Betancourt agreed that teenagers needed some guidance on sexual matters but that should be given father-son and mother-daughter only.³⁹ The UNPF also connected sex education to the rise of communism, which in their view had the objective to corrupt children and youth, to promote children’s disdain for mothers and fathers, and to encourage free and temporary sexual unions that would end up in the total destruction of the family and the stability of the nation.⁴⁰ The conservative newspaper *Excelsior* gave voice to the opposition and was an active actor in the protest. For example on 25 May 1933, an editorial announced that protests would be so strong that the sex education project was condemned to failure.⁴¹

³⁷ Ignacio Bravo Betancourt, ‘Opinión de La Unión de Padres de Familia’, *El Universal*, 14 June 1933. In Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*, 60.

³⁸ View Chapter 2, section 2.2.3.

³⁹ Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*, 59–61.

⁴⁰ Bravo Betancourt, ‘Es Adversa La Opinión de Los Padres a La Educación Sexual Impartida Por Los Profesores’, 7.

⁴¹ ‘Otra Vez La Amenaza de La Educación Sexual’, *Excelsior*, 25 May 1933, sec. Editorial, 5. The date was just one day after the publication of the first part of the SEP’s CTC report in *El Nacional*.

The first confrontations over sex education occurred in the commission organized by the nurses and midwives. The UNPF believed that it was an official commission created by the SEP, but when after the first session was held on 8 June 1933, and they learned that it was created on the suggestion of the PCEP, they decided to leave it.⁴² The UNPF argued that organizations against sex education, or anti-eugenics, were not enough represented and blamed physician Pruneda (SEP's representative in the commission) for making them believe that it was an official SEP commission.⁴³

In the following months, protest went beyond the mass media, including demonstrations on the street and other public places like cinemas or theatres. For example on 11 June 1933, the ANPLE held a protest at the Frontón Hispano Mexicano to discuss the issue of school-based sex-education. According to *Excélsior* around one thousand people attended this meeting, with the participation of doctors and lawyers and the recognized politician Luis Cabrera.⁴⁴ In this demonstration the speakers agreed that sex education was the responsibility only of to parents, and that they would organize a strike (not sending their

⁴² This commission held meetings every Thursday at 20 hours in the offices of the SEP's Departamento de Psicopedagogía e Higiene (Psycho-pedagogy and Hygiene Department). 'Corresponde a Los Padres de Familia La Educación Sexual de Los Pequeños', *Excélsior*, 9 June 1933, 1.

⁴³ They mentioned that the documents of the commission were printed in official SEP's paper. 'No Da Garantías a Los Padres La Junta de Educación Sexual', *Excélsior*, 10 June 1933, 8. Del Castillo assumed that this commission was organized by the SEP and considered the exit of the UNPF as their first success against the initiative. Del Castillo Troncoso, 'La Polémica En Torno a La Educación Sexual', 214.

⁴⁴ Other speakers in this meeting were: lawyers Octavio Elizalde y Ernesto Lecompte; physician José Meza Gutierrez and Mr. Manuel Villagrán. 'Se Llegara Hasta La Huelga Escolar Para Defender a Los Niños', *Excélsior*, 12 June 1933, 1. Cabrera had been a loyal constitutionalist and accompanied Carranza when he was assassinated in 1920. After this Cabrera became a critic of the following revolutionary governments. Doralicia Carmona Dávila, 'Luis Cabrera 1876-1954', *Memoria Política de México*, accessed 12 July 2016, <http://www.memoriapoliticademexico.org/Biografias/CAL76.html>.

children to the school) if the government implemented sex education in primary schools. They also talked against the secularization of education.⁴⁵

At the end of July 1933 the FAPF also left the commission organized by PCEP. The FAPF stated as their position about sex education that it should be only given by parents to boys older than fourteen and “girls” older than twenty-one.⁴⁶ The FAPF manifested their discomfort with the sex education initiative but did so in a milder way. Giving Bassols’ declarations that the SEP wanted to know society’s opinion, in early August 1933 the FAPF offered to ask all their members if they were for or against sex education. Some newspapers interpreted this as an official plebiscite.⁴⁷ Likewise, the UNPF organized their own plebiscite through national media asking parents to send them the answer to the following question: “Do you agree with your children, and especially your daughters, being compulsorily taught the SEXUAL SECRETS in school?”⁴⁸ In relation to these consultations Minister Bassols established SEP’s position. He declared that the SEP could not decide on a plebiscite about sex education, as in any other of their subjects, connected to scientific principles. Bassols declared that these votes were most of the time based on “prejudices and mystifications.”⁴⁹ He concluded the SEP would listen to weighted and sober studies more than simple signatures from “people that would most of the time have difficulties explaining what they

⁴⁵ ‘Se Llegara Hasta La Huelga Escolar Para Defender a Los Niños’, 1.

⁴⁶ ‘Rechazan Los Padres de Familia El Plan de Educación Sexual’, *Excélsior*, 26 July 1933, 1.

⁴⁷ ‘Una Encuesta Respecto a La E. Sexual’, *El Nacional*, 2 August 1933.

⁴⁸ *El Universal*, 3 junio 1933 in Del Castillo Troncoso, ‘La Polémica En Torno a La Educación Sexual’, 215. A woman teacher that supported sex education accused the UNPF of slyly changing the terms of the debate, by changing the term “sex education” by “sexual secrets”. María Becerra González, ‘El Problema de La Educación Sexual I’, *Imagen*, 30 June 1933. In: Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*, 35–8.

⁴⁹ Narciso Bassols, ‘Cómo Resolver El Problema de La Educación Sexual’, *El Nacional*, 3 August 1933.

understand by sex education.”⁵⁰ Bassols announced that “good reasons supported by only one signature would be worth more than thousands of them given blindly.”⁵¹ He also regretted the connection between the protests against sex education and what he called “clerical propaganda” as shown in recent demonstrations in different cinemas in Mexico City that concluded with the yells “Long live Christ the King! Down with constitutional article 3!”⁵² The FAPF responded to Bassols that the confusion was created by the newspapers, that they only wanted to know the opinion of their associates and denied any relation with the clerical protests. The FAPF accused SEP for parent’s anxieties regarding sex education, because in their view SEP had not provided them with enough information about the process of implementation. The FAPF personally believed that the “parents’ vote was not that negligible even if their signatures did not qualify as what were considered good reasons by the Ministry of Education.”⁵³ And the FAPF asked the SEP to give them clear and definitive information on the issue for them to express an opinion.⁵⁴

The discomfort about the initiative also showed in other Mexican states. Parents of Puebla protested about a eugenics class introduced at the Normal school, which they interpreted as a preparation to introduce sex education in elementary schools. They asked the authorities to remove the subject and students not to attend it.⁵⁵ Also *Excelsior* reported a

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid. These yells were characteristic of the Cristero war from 1926-1929. See Chapter 3, section 3.1.

⁵³ This document was signed by Lawyers Gustavo E. Rodríguez and Francisco Pizarro, and colonel E. López Araiza. ‘Hace Aclaraciones La Federación de Padres de Familia’, *El Nacional*, 4 August 1933, 1, 8.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ About students the article said that despite parents’ prohibition they were attending this class. ‘Los Padres de Puebla Contra La Educación Sexual’, *Excelsior*, 9 June 1933, sec. Editorial, 5.

letter from Morelia with the signatures of more than five thousand parents to protest against sex education.⁵⁶

5.3. The last advances of the initiative and its final failure in 1934

The polemic rekindled in 1934. In Britton's view this revival was linked to the resolution of the PNR convention at the end of 1933 to introduce socialist education. The protests now took a more aggressive form and were often directed to Minister Bassols in a personal way.⁵⁷ On 9 January 1934 the newspaper *Excélsior* leaked what they believed was the program for sex education for the sixth grade in primary schools, and announced that teachers would start teaching it on 15 of January 1934. The program was different for boys and girls and included knowledge on the sexual organs and glands and their function in reproduction. The program for girls was particularly extensive and included a section in puericulture.⁵⁸ The next day, Bassols published a response in *El Nacional* in which he explained that the excerpt published by *Excélsior* was part of a project program created by a commission⁵⁹ and that it was in process of discussion in the Primary School Council, or CEP,⁶⁰ which by law had to approve any curricula modification for elementary education. He criticized *Excélsior* for publishing

⁵⁶ 'El Tiro de Gracia a La Educación Sexual', *Excélsior*, 31 July 1933, sec. Editorial, 5.

⁵⁷ Bassols was a recognized socialist, although he did not agree on the implementation of socialist education, this plus his support to the secularization of private secondary schools and the sex education proposal were enough to direct against him the anger of those who disagreed with these policies. Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México I*, 103–5. For studies about socialist education in Mexico see: Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México II*; Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*; Josefina Vázquez de Knauth, *Nacionalismo Y Educación En México*.

⁵⁸ To see the program go to Annex 1.

⁵⁹ The commission was integrated by teacher José Arturo Pichardo, president of the CEP, teacher César Ruíz, president of the CTC, teacher Luis Hidalgo Monroy Chief of the Departamento de Enseñanza Primaria y Normal (Department of Primary and Teacher Training Schools) and physician Alfonso Pruneda, Member of the CTC. They elaborated a project of sex education and submitted it to the Primary School Council on 21 December 1933.

⁶⁰ Consejo de Educación Primaria.

this program in a deceitful and incomplete way and clarified that until that time no program had been approved yet. Bassols explained the criteria of the SEP regarding sex education. He said that the difficulties inherent to the problem were not a reason to ignore it, that the SEP could not take “an awkward ostrich attitude.”⁶¹ That it was necessary that primary schools providing children with a complete vision of the world and life, that morals should not be based on ignorance and that it was a school’s obligation to “channel children’s instincts based on the clear knowledge of natural phenomena... viewed in a clean and healthy way, without prig mystifications or morbid anticipation.”⁶² To teach children scientific notions on the reproduction of living beings would help end superstitions and instill new generations with a “rational, truthful, thus healthy and moral notion of life.”⁶³ In Bassols’ view the polemic about sex education entailed the collision between two antagonistic moral conceptions. One that “intende[d] to base human conduct on ignorance or fear of the beyond, and one that [was] trying to construct a social concept of life, in which the limits of human conduct [were] born from the solidarity of men and their longing for a better common life.”⁶⁴ Bassols’ declarations also anticipated the possibility that the sex education program could fail to be implemented. He resented those who had used agitation and scandal to fight against the diffusion of knowledge in primary schools about “the phenomenon of life, of the reproduction of living beings, vegetable, animal and human, in one word, about sex and its problems.”⁶⁵ He called them “fake educators” and announced that every generation would push to know the truth,

⁶¹ Narciso Bassols, ‘Nada Hay Aun Sobre La Educación Sexual’, *El Nacional*, 10 January 1934, 8.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

and that the consequences of not having sex education, the “thousands of ill, unhappy and misanthropic beings,” would be a stigma on those who opposed sex education.⁶⁶

Bassols also informed the public that the CEP had agreed on two principles for sex education: 1) That it should be part of a gradual process starting from the first year of primary school, and 2) That sex education should be integrated in the existing subjects (natural and physical sciences) and not constitute a separate one.⁶⁷ The project discussed by the CEP established the need to update the program of 1931 that in their view had an omission by not including anything related to sex education. Sex education should be considered part of an integral education for the well-being of the individual and the community and would carry the benefits of scientific education, like in other areas of life, through the formation of good habits.⁶⁸

Bassols’ explanation in the sense that sex education was not implemented yet but that the SEP intended to include it as part of the program of natural sciences did not relieve his opponents. On 13 January 1934 *Excelsior* published an extensive critique elaborated by the ANPLE.⁶⁹ Three days later *Excelsior* again leaked information, now about a booklet that was being printed at the national press, called *La educación sexual del niño. Lo que deben saber todos los niños* by William J. Fielding. The newspaper announced that it would be distributed among children and that it was an example of the pornography that sex education would

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Bassols, ‘Nada Hay Aun Sobre La Educación Sexual’.

⁶⁸ Ibid. On 11 January 1934 *El Nacional* published the project of the “Program for the study of nature” for first and second grade that would serve as base for sex education. ‘Texto Del Proyecto Que Se Ha Propuesto Como Programa Para La Educación Sexual’, *El Nacional*, 11 January 1934, 1, 7.

⁶⁹ José Meza Gutiérrez, ‘Una Protesta Contra La Educación Sexual En Nuestras Escuelas’, *Excelsior*, 13 January 1934.

promote.⁷⁰ That same day the SEP in *El Nacional* clarified that it was true that the booklet was being printed but that it was planned for parents to inform them about basic notions of the reproduction of the living beings, and criticized *Excélsior* for giving information in an incorrect and spiteful way.⁷¹

On 23 January 1934 a group of women who defined themselves as mothers and who belonged to the UNPF went to the SEP building to ask for the suspension of sex education in public and private elementary schools.⁷² Dissenters wanted to talk to Minister Bassols. He was not present and they were received by his personal secretary lawyer Moreno Gallardo, who assured them that sex education was not yet implemented. The protesters were disappointed because they could not talk to Bassols, and complained to the press about it and announced that they would not allow their daughters go to school if sex education was implemented.⁷³ On 26 January 1934 the UNPF had a meeting at the theatre “Díaz de León” where according to *Excélsior* two thousand parents agreed not to send their children to schools in case sex education was implemented. The UNPF also showed indignation about the lack of attention that in their view the mothers’ contingent had received from Bassols and called all women in the nation to adhere to their movement against sex education.⁷⁴ The UNPF explained that they would establish surveillance and strike committees in every school and that in case they discovered a professor was teaching sex education they would stop sending their children to school and do all in their hands to isolate those professors, socially

⁷⁰ ‘La Cuestión Palpitante’, 15 January 1934, sec. Editorial, 5.

⁷¹ Secretaría de Educación Pública, ‘Campana Que Solo Tiende a Desorientar’, *El Nacional*, 15 January 1934, 1, 6.

⁷² I make the connection between this group of women who identified as mothers and the UNPF because days later the UNPF publicly condemned that they were not received by Bassols. See below in the text.

⁷³ ‘Protestan En La Metrópoli Por La Educación Sexual’, *El Informador*, 24 January 1934, 1, 6.

⁷⁴ ‘Dos Mil Padres Resuelven No Enviar Sus Niños a La Escuela’, *Excélsior*, 27 January 1934.

disabling them from teaching ever again, and to boycott them in case they had other economic activities.⁷⁵ These committees would be secret, one for men and one for women and they would get their information by asking children. From this time onwards lots of rumours circulated in the press about supposed teachers giving sex education classes in an immoral way.⁷⁶ Parents also found subjects related to sex education in secondary and high schools since 1931 and used them as a prove that sex education was already being taught.⁷⁷

Students were also active in the polemic about sex education. For example, women students from the Mexico City Commercial School congratulated Bassols for his support for introducing sex education.⁷⁸ Male students in Veracruz also showed approval for sex education and declared they wanted to know more about it and transfer their knowledge to the working-class masses.⁷⁹ On the other hand, male students from the faculty of Law participated in protests against sex education. On 17 February 1934 a group of students gave a speech against sex education at the “Cine Montecarlo” and fourteen men were detained in “El Carmen” prison.⁸⁰ The students were part of the Revolutionary Confederation of Independent Parties, a political organization that opposed the PNR and its presidential

⁷⁵ ‘La Actitud de Los Padres de Familia Ante Un Grave Peligro’, *Excelsior*, 29 January 1934, sec. Editorial.

⁷⁶ See for example: ‘Criminal Labor de Maestros de Escuela’, *Excelsior*, 10 February 1934, 1, 9. And articles in *El Nacional* from February 11 to 16 that responded to these rumours by visiting the schools and getting declaration from teachers and parents.

⁷⁷ For secondary schools opponents to sex education found that in third grade there was a class that included notions of anatomy, physiology and hygiene for students in third grade. ‘Criminal Labor de Maestros de Escuela’. About high school they found that in the ENP there was a class on Adolescence and Youth Hygiene. ‘Más Escuelas Donde Se Enseña El Sexualismo’, *Excelsior*, 12 February 1934, 1.

⁷⁸ ‘Comentarios Al Día’, *El Informador*, 12 January 1934.

⁷⁹ ‘Interesantes Discusiones En Veracruz’, *El Nacional*, 3 September 1933, sec. second, 2.

⁸⁰ ‘Estudiantes Presos En Dura Huelga de Hambre’, *Excelsior*, 21 February 1934, 1. Other newspaper articles said the protest was Sunday on 18 February 1934. ‘Protestan Por La Detención de Los Estudiantes Que Externaron Ideas Contrarias a La Educación Sexual’, *El Informador*, 20 February 1934. Anne Rubenstein wrote an article about this protest. See: Rubenstein, ‘Raised Voices in the Cine Montecarlo.’

candidate Cárdenas.⁸¹ In the following days there were protests of other students asking for the student's liberation and the students in prison conducted a hunger strike.⁸² The students were finally released from prison on 22 February 1934.⁸³

Women continued to have an active role against the implementation of sex education. On 7 April 1934 a group of mothers and girls participated in a street protest that was broken up by the police and the fire brigade when they passed in front of the SEP building, producing the involvement of students and public indignation. Students in the Faculty of Law noticed the situation and opened the doors to offer refuge to the women. The firefighters tried to knock down the door with their axes and the police shot a few times at the windows of the building. The students responded back throwing bricks to the police. Only the intervention of the UNAM rector Manuel Gómez Morín, stopped the disturbance.⁸⁴ That same day students took to the streets to show outrage about the occurrences. They justified their actions as an act of gentlemanliness to protect women.⁸⁵ In the following days students and workers (from the Block of Workers and Peasants) continued to protest against the treatment mothers received from the state forces.⁸⁶

⁸¹ In Spanish, Confederación Revolucionaria de Partidos Independientes.

⁸² 'Estudiantes Presos En Dura Huelga de Hambre', 1.

⁸³ 'Los Estudiantes de México Provocan Otro Escandalo so Pretexto de La Educación Sexual', *El Informador*, 24 February 1934, 5. There were several injured, including police officers, firefighters, students and even UNAM's rector Gómez Morín. 'El Escandalo Estudiantil de Ayer', *El Nacional*, 8 April 1934, 2.

⁸⁴ Manuel Gómez Morín was a prominent lawyer at that time and in 1939 he founded the opposition Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party, PAN).

⁸⁵ 'Sangrientos Sucesos Registraronse Ayer En La Capital de La República', *El Informador*, 8 April 1934, 1–2.

⁸⁶ 'El Señor Presidente Dirige Un Mensaje a Los Estudiantes', *El Informador*, 10 April 1934, 1–2. *El Nacional*, reported that other political groups of the opposition joined women's and children's protest and that all of them asked for Bassols resignation. 'El Escandalo Estudiantil de Ayer', 1–2.

Women also sent letters to president Rodríguez, asking him to revoke the program of sex education.⁸⁷ In one of those letters, Mrs. Luz María Anaya, president of the society of mothers of Lagos de Moreno Jalisco, showed their indignation for the treatment that the protesting mothers had received in April in Mexico City and asked the president as the only present for the next Mother's Day, instead of all the public speeches and festivals, to revoke the repudiated program of sex education and also project of socialist or rationalist education, and to let mothers and fathers free to give their children an education according to their convictions.⁸⁸

The UNPF started strikes in April in Mexico City; by May 1934 some 40 schools out of 485 were affected by it.⁸⁹ Not all parents associations agreed with this method, for example the FAPF condemned the strike.⁹⁰ But UNPF president Bravo-Betancourt justified strikes as the last resort to protect children and youth from the terrible effects of sex education. Bravo-Betancourt declared ignorance was preferable to "corruption."⁹¹ One editorial in *El Nacional* feared that a continuation of the Cristero war was about to begin, sparked by the alarm produced by the press and parents' associations about SEP's intention to introduce sex education.⁹² *El Nacional* denounced the UNPF for using the issue of sex education to

⁸⁷ AGN/México Contemporáneo/Archivos Presidenciales / Abelardo L. Rodríguez/folder 580/169-1. In this folder there are letters from 12 (out of 32) Mexican states (Jalisco, Oaxaca, Hidalgo, Puebla, Mexico City, Guanajuato, Veracruz, Michoacán, San Luis Potosí, Coahuila, Mexico and Zacatecas). The majority of letters were written by mothers but there are some also written by fathers and some letters contain a list of signatures supporting them.

⁸⁸ AGN/México Contemporáneo/Archivos Presidenciales/ Abelardo L. Rodríguez/folder 580/169-1, 008965.

⁸⁹ Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México I*, 107. Other parents associations, like the one in the state of Coahuila showed their support to the strike and announced they will follow it in case sex education was implemented. 'Los Obreros de La "Fe" de Torreon, Llegaron Por Fin a Un Acuerdo Favorable', *El Nacional*, 18 February 1934, sec. second.

⁹⁰ 'Condenan Las Huelgas La Federación de Padres', *Excelsior*, 9 April 1934, 1.

⁹¹ *La Palabra*, 20 April 1934, referred by Narciso Bassols in his resignation letter. 'Presentó Su Renuncia El C. Secretario de Educación', *El Nacional*, 10 May 1934, 7, BPEJ.

⁹² 'La Nueva Oposición', *El Nacional*, 14 February 1934, sec. Editorial, 3.

continue their protest against the secularization of secondary schools initiated in 1931.⁹³ An article in *El Nacional* on 18 February 1934 presented a summary of recent events against sex education organized by the UNPF and the ANPLE⁹⁴ On these occasions the protesters spoke out in favour of the strike and against the secularization of schools, sex education, and socialist education. There were yells asking for Bassols' resignation as well as violent thoughts against his person, like the desire to shave Bassols' eyebrows or two lines on his head to form a cross.⁹⁵ The government's vexation about these events was clear, showing its indignation *El Nacional* published a hand-out distributed by the ANPLE to promote an event that same day. The ANPLE leaflet asked parents: Do you want your children to become perverts as the sex education and socialist education intend?⁹⁶ *El Nacional* also published a pastoral letter by the city of Morelia Archbishop, Leopoldo Ruiz, from 1 February 1934, in which he rejected socialist and sex education and demanded parents to oppose them because they represented an attack on Christian morality, which was parent's obligation to preserve in their children. All these data were used by the government to sustain their argument that the opposition was being organized by the Catholic Church and that opponents pursued political goals and not the defence of children's innocence as they argued.⁹⁷

By this time the conflict with teacher leaders had also escalated, and both conflicts became related as some teacher leaders –Vilchis, Lino Santacruz, and five others –supported

⁹³ 'Otro Capítulo de La Misma Historia', *El Nacional*, 16 February 1934.

⁹⁴ One event was held on 4 of February 1934 at the Theatre Iris, by the UNPF, other by this same organization on 7th February at the Jardin Cinema in Mixcoac. The ANPLE organized an event on 12 February 1934 in Tacubaya in front of the Ermita building. 'Un Trozo de Historia Contemporánea', *El Nacional*, 18 February 1934, 2.

⁹⁵ The ideas about shaving Bassols were expressed at the event on 4 of February 1934. *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁶ The meeting point was at Calzada México Tacuba 738 in front of the Independence Statue. *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ The Pastoral letter was signed in San Antonio Texas, where the Archbishop lived in exile. 'Un Trozo de Historia Contemporánea'.

the strike and also some parents supported these leaders' opposition to Minister Bassols.⁹⁸ In April Bassols removed director Valentin Zamora from the school "Emiliano Zapata" to a different one. Bassols removed some opposing teachers as a strategy to reduce their capacity of mobilization.⁹⁹ To protest against this, parents decided not to send their children to school for three days.¹⁰⁰ A few days later three other schools supported this strike.¹⁰¹ Teachers' that opposed Bassols also burst in a teachers' meeting organized in the open theatre "Alvaro Obregon" in the SEP building on 13 April 1934. After these events, president Rodríguez supported Bassols and asked him to start the corresponding procedures against the "fake teachers."¹⁰² These teachers were judged by the Justice and Competence Tribunal inside SEP for their participation in the sex education strikes and other activities against the SEP and on 7 May 1934 condemned them to lose their posts.¹⁰³

All these tensions came to a head and on 9 May 1934 Minister Bassols presented his resignation, and with it the program of sex education was dropped. In his letter to the president, Bassols gave equal weight to the problem with teachers' leaders and the protests

⁹⁸ The name of the other teachers are: Pablo Rendon, Julián Falconi, Valentín Zamora, José Cenicero Rios and Jorge Cashonda. 'El Conflicto de Los Profesores', *Excélsior*, 7 May 1934, 1. For example an article in *El Nacional* linked the mother's protest on 7 April 1934, with the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Magisteriales, directed by Vilchis, and with the issues of the school "Emiliano Zapata" and professor Valentin Zamora, explained below. 'Otra Protesta de Maestros', *El Nacional*, 11 April 1934, 1.

⁹⁹ Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México I*, 94–5.

¹⁰⁰ 'Votan La Huelga En Una Escuela de Esta Capital', *Excélsior*, 6 April 1934, 1.

¹⁰¹ 'Estallará La Huelga General En Señal de Protesta', *Excélsior*, 7 April 1934, 1.

¹⁰² 'Condena La Presidencia de La República La Actitud de Los Maestros', *Excélsior*, 14 April 1934, 10.

¹⁰³ This procedure was polemical as the Justice and Competence Tribunal decided that the process would be close and only written proves would be presented. The professors wanted the procedure to be open and be able to argue their positions and refused to present a written defence. So they were judged only with the documents that accused them. 'Los Siete Profesores Acusados, Condenados', *El Nacional*, 9 May 1934, 1; Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México I*, 110–2. After Bassols resignation these professors asked for a revision of the judgment, and it is clear that in the case of Vilchis he got back his post as a teacher and his leadership position during Cárdenas presidency. 'Pidieron Amparo Los Profesores', *Excélsior*, 10 May 1934, 1; Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México I*, 80.

against the “distorted and corrupted issue of sex education,” which in his view was a continuation of the protest by the clerical forces against the secularization of secondary schools. Bassols suggested his resignation would help to make it clear that the campaign of the opposition was not only against one person, but the government policies, and to clarify that his dispute with teachers was not for the sake of personal power but for a better organization of the SEP.¹⁰⁴ President Rodríguez responded that he felt obliged to accept Bassols’ resignation to stop the attacks that were lately directed to his person, but that this acceptance of Bassols’ resignation did not mean a change of principles in the Revolution or an act of weakness from the government. Rodríguez concluded that “the adaptation of the system of education to the form of government [was] the most important factor for the permanence of political systems.”¹⁰⁵ For this reason his government was determined “to destroy religious prejudices on education, using the power of the revolutionary men and the propagation of schools as a means to arrive to a positive and truly secular education.”¹⁰⁶ It was very significant that the news about Bassols’ resignation appeared on 10 May, Mexican Mother’s day, which could be interpreted as the demanded present by the protesting mothers from the president.¹⁰⁷ On May 14 the strike that continued in 20 schools ended.¹⁰⁸

5.4. Conclusion

¹⁰⁴ ‘Presentó Su Renuncia El C. Secretario de Educación’, 1, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ It is important to notice that Bassols did not lose estimation from the President, who only exchanged in their posts the Minister of Interior Lawyer Eduardo Vasconcelos and Minister of Education Narciso Bassols, as announced one day after Bassols resignation. ‘Hay Nuevos Secretarios de Educación Y Gobernación’, *El Nacional*, 11 May 1934.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Terminará La Huelga En Las Esculas de México’, *Excélsior*, 13 May 1934, 1.

The sex education initiative came at a time when there were strong tensions in Mexican society regarding the secularization of schools, which affected both the economic interests of the Church and the sensibilities of middle and upper-class parents that defended their right to have their children taught religion at school. For the government, sex education was a logical consequence of the integration of new scientific knowledge, in this case about the origins of life, aiming to prevent venereal diseases and to promote informed motherhood, which was part of a biopolitical project aimed at improving the lives and bodies of Mexicans. Physicians that promoted sex education, including women physicians, gained support and influence, by backing a state policy that was based on scientific knowledge and was therefore regarded as progressive and modern. Also, some of them like Pruneda, occupied positions within the state institutions. Advocates also believed in the importance of viewing sexuality from a scientific perspective, and giving knowledge to the new generations for the prevention of diseases, “perversions” and the improvement of the “race”. On the other hand, parents’ organizations, many of them with strong Catholic ties, viewed sex education as another intrusion on their right to educate their children in the way they wanted. For the leadership of UNPF, ANPLE and *Excelsior*, sex education provided a motive to gain support for their opposition to the secularization of schools and what can be seen as a campaign generally opposed to change in a period of great transformations in Mexican society. Groups discontent with state policies formed an alliance to make their forces stronger, as shown by the association between teachers’ leaders and the UNPF.

Mexico and France show some similarities in the disputes over the implementation of sex education. In both countries the opposition to sex education was directed by Catholic oriented parents’ organizations that followed the Vatican encyclical letters. Also sex

education signified a conflict in the educational system where Catholic schools had strong participation. De Luca Barrusse and Praz argue that in France a reason for the failure of the implementation of sex education was the lack of cooperation between the medical advocates and the educational administrators.¹⁰⁹ In this aspect the case of Mexico is different, as both physicians and educational administrators with the support of the President lobbied together to implement sex education and they nevertheless failed to do so. Some reasons for this failure could be the lack of penetration of government ideals influenced by new scientific and social theories into the majority of the population and a strong influence of the Catholic Church in defining what acceptable and unacceptable behaviour was. By the dissemination of its own discourses that competed in legitimacy with those of the government, the Catholic Church worked as a strong opponent of the state and as an institution that exercised its own biopolitical power over society.

Both the content of the proposal and the protests had a gendered character. In this chapter I only outlined the main arguments of SEP and the opposition and in the next two chapters will deal with how gender and sexuality were constructed by advocates and opponents, respectively.

¹⁰⁹ De Luca Barrusse and Praz, 'The Emergence of Sex Education: A Franco-Swiss Comparison, 1900-1930', 54.

Chapter 6.

Gender and sexuality in the discourses of sex education supporters

In this chapter I will analyse a series of documents defending the implementation of school-based sex education in Mexico in the early 1930s. These are editorials and newspaper articles from the pro-government *El Nacional*; and some editorials that were published by the SEP in 1934, as well as articles from 1933, published in different newspapers;¹ a paper called “Orientations and Program of Sex Education for Secondary Schools in Mexico,” by physician Raul González-Enríquez² submitted to the 1932 competition organized by the National Academy of Medicine or ANM;³ a book called *La educación sexual en la escuela mexicana. Libro para los padres y los maestros* (Sex Education in Mexican Schools, Book for Parents and Teachers) published in 1933 by physician Juan L. Soto and teacher A. Pérez y Soto.⁴ Due to its extension this book is a very valuable source on the content of sex education in

¹ Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*. From the sixteen editorial in favour of sex education, eight were from newspapers others than *El Nacional*.

² González-Enríquez (1906-1952) got his medical degree at the UNAM in 1929. He specialized in psychiatry, social medicine and criminology. He promoted the introduction of psychoanalysis in Mexico and was a promoter of sex education in secondary schools that started in the early 1940s. Suárez y López Guazo, *Eugenesia Y Racismo En México*, 244.

³ The ANM organized a yearly paper’s contest. In 1932 the two topics were Orientations and Program of Sex Education for Secondary Schools in Mexico and the Kala-Azar in Mexico a tropical parasite infection. The ANM reported that they had received 5 papers on the topic of sex education but that no one was worthy of the prize, that consisted in a gold medal and a diploma. They decided that two works were good enough to publish them; the ones presented by doctors Octavio Rojas Avedaño and Raúl González Enríquez. I was able to find the last one in the archives. Academia Nacional de Medicina, ‘Convocatoria Para El Concurso 1932’, *Periodico Oficial Del Gobierno Del Estado de Hidalgo*, 24 June 1932; ‘Asuntos Varios’, *Gaceta Médica de México*, 1 October 1932, 507–12; ‘Asuntos Varios’, *Gaceta Médica de México*, 1 October 1933.

⁴ Physician Juan L. Soto studied in Europe and worked in 1933 as a Chief of the Urinary Medical Clinic of the Military Hospital and teacher A. Pérez y Soto participated actively in the educational sector in the state of Veracruz and in 1933 and was a school inspector in Mexico City. Britton, *Educación Y Radicalismo En México I*, 102.

Mexico in the 1930s. In analysing these sources I will attempt to show how gender and sexuality were constructed by proponents of sex education.

In this chapter I first focus on what the strategy of supporters of sex education was. Second I argue that this sex education proposal can be seen as part of the biopolitical project directed by the state that aimed at the improvement of its citizen's bodies for their own wellbeing and that of the community. Third I review the different programs of sex education for boys and girls. Fourth, I explore how ideals of gender differentiation contributed to create the male/female dichotomy and delimitate what it was to be a man and a woman. Fifth, I focus on construction of sexuality, how an "ideal" development of the sexual instinct was established, which served as the framework to explain "deviant ones;" how homosexuality was conceptualized as well as other "deviations" from the heterosexual ideals of femininity and masculinity; how reproduction was presented as the ideal of sexuality and how it affected men and women in different ways.

6.1. Strategies of advocates of sex education

The strongest supporters of sex education were physicians, plus some professors and journalists, a few of them were women.⁵ They argued on the need to introduce sex education based on the new theories that gave sexuality centrality in the constitution of the individual, which also made it responsible for negative outcomes like problems with heredity, physical and mental diseases and what were constructed as deviations of the sexual instinct, meaning in many cases homosexuality. Advocates disseminated their scientific knowledge through

⁵ In section 6.6., this chapter I will focus on the participation of women in the promotion of sex education.

newspapers, lectures and books that intended to stress the importance of sex education in modern times.

Sex education was the topic of several lectures at health congresses and at scientific and cultural associations from 1932 to 1934. For example, in a Medical Conference in Morelia in 1932 there was a lecture on sex education⁶ and on the First Congress of Nurses and Midwives or PCEP on January 1933, where physician Celia A. del Campillo presented a program for sex education.⁷ There were some lectures organized by the Tribuna de Mexico, an organization that belonged to the Ateneo de Ciencias y Artes, which according to Stepan was the most prestigious scientific society in Mexico.⁸ The first two were about “A Sex Education Program for Secondary Schools,” on the 16th and 23rd June 1933, by physician Octavio Rojas Avedaño, who was a founding member of the SEM.⁹ Other talks were “Sex Education and the New Pedagogy,” by essayist Baltazar Domundo;¹⁰ and “Sexual Instinct Laws,” by physician Roberto Solís Quiroga.¹¹ Sex education was debated in June 1933 as part of the Eugenic Week under the auspices of the Ateneo de Ciencias y Artes with the participation of many outstanding figures in Mexico’s public life.¹² The ANM dedicated its

⁶ The talk was given by physician Enrique Arreguin Jr. ‘Resonante éxito Obtuvo En El Congreso Medico de Morelia, El Dr. C. Kunhardt’, *El Informador*, 8 December 1932, 1.

⁷ ‘Implantación de Cursos de Higiene Y de Moral Sexual En Las Escuelas’, *El Nacional*, 10 January 1933, BPEJ. See Annex 1 for Del Campillo’s program.

⁸ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*, 133.

⁹ ‘Educación Sexual Solo Desde Las Secundarias’, *El Nacional*, 17 June 1933. ‘El Programa de E. Sexual’, *El Nacional*, 24 June 1933.

¹⁰ ‘Conferencias’, *El Nacional*, 30 June 1933, sec. segunda, 6.

¹¹ ‘Conferencias. Tribuna de México’, *El Nacional*, 5 August 1933, sec. second, 6. Solís Quiroga (1898-1967) was an outstanding physician who specialized on psychology: general, pathologic, on Children and on teenagers. He founded in 1926 the Juvenile Courts. Solís Quiroga also worked as a professor in the faculties of Law and Philosophy and letters at UNAM and the National School of Teachers. He was the Doctors Director at SEP in 1935 and that year he founded the Teaching Medical Institute. ‘Solís Quiroga, Roberto’, *Diccionario de Historia de La Educación En México*, accessed 20 July 2016, http://biblioweb.tic.unam.mx/diccionario/htm/biografias/bio_s/solis_quiroga.htm.

¹² For example politician Felix Palavicini, who was Minister of Instruction from 1914 a 1916 and participated in the writing of the Constitution in 1917. Other attendants were physicians Alfredo M. Saavedra (SEM

sessions in February, 1934 to sex education. Alfonso Pruneda gave a lecture on the role of physicians and sex education,¹³ and Hircano Ayuso O’Horibe about school-based sex education, foundations, programs, objections and methodology.¹⁴ The Social Sciences Latin American Institute organized a lecture on the topic by psychiatrist Alfonso Millán Maldonado.¹⁵ The Asociación Impulsora de la Cultura Popular Alfa (or AICPA) invited Ayuso O’Horibe to speak about sex education.¹⁶ The Normal School of the city of Puebla and the students’ congress of Veracruz also organized lectures on sex education.¹⁷

Some professional associations explained their position on the topic. In an article published on 2 July 1933 in *El Nacional*, the Society for the Study on Neurology and Psychiatry explained that sex education was a right of the new generations that would provide them with the existing scientific knowledge on sexuality. Because sex education was different from having sexual experiences, parents who had not received this kind of education were unable at the time to provide information to the youth of both sexes. For these psychiatrists sex education had to break with the notions of “honour,” “modesty,” and “sin,”

president), Adrian Correa (SEM member), Alfonso Pruneda (ANM permanent secretary) and psychiatrist Ignacio Millán. ‘En El Ateneo de Las Ciencias’, *El Nacional*, 24 June 1933, 7. ‘Que El Educando Pida Explicaciones Y No Que El Mentor Las Ofrezca’, *El Nacional*, 30 June 1933, 1.

¹³ ‘Conferencias’, *El Nacional*, 7 February 1934, 5.

¹⁴ ‘Sociedades’, *El Nacional*, 21 February 1934, 5. ‘Sociedades. 28 Feb 1934’, *El Nacional*, 28 February 1934, 5.

¹⁵ ‘El Dr. Alfonso Millan Dijo Una Conferencia Sobre Educación Sexual’, *El Nacional*, 5 September 1933, 2. Millán (1906-1975) studied medicine at UNAM and then realized postgraduate studies on legal medicine and psychiatry in Paris. He was among the first to introduce Freud’s theories to México. Millán worked at the Mexico City General Mental Hospital from 1932 to 1970 and was its director from 1934 to 1938. Suárez y López Guazo, *Eugenesis Y Racismo En México*, 237. Rodolfo Álvarez del Castillo, ‘Breve Cronología Del Psicoanálisis En México’, *Carta Psicoanalítica. Psicoanálisis En México Y El Mundo*, accessed 22 July 2016, <http://cartapsi.org/mexico/psimex.htm>.

¹⁶ The AICPA was founded by ex-president (1928-1930) Emilio Portes Gil to give educational lectures to working-classes. ‘Festival’, *El Nacional*, 5 September 1933, 5.

¹⁷ Jorge Labra, ‘Los Padres Poblanos Contra La Educación Sexual’, *Excelsior*, 9 June 1933, sec. Editorial, 5; ‘Interesantes Discusiones En Veracruz’, *El Nacional*, 3 September 1933, sec. second, 2.

present in Mexican society. The document was signed by physician Millan and Matilde Rodríguez Cabo.¹⁸

Not all supporters agreed on everything related to sex education, and one of the topics of debate was the age at which children should get sex education. Some like the SEP's CTC and Del Campillo believed that it had to start in primary school, whereas others like Rojas Avedaño believed that it was only suitable for secondary schools.¹⁹ Others like the SEM had an ambivalent position. Some SEM members declared that the ideal sex education was parent-child but urged SEP to introduce school-based sex education. However, it was not practical to teach sex education in an individual way in the school system.²⁰ There were several programs offered: by the SEP, by the SEM, by female physician Del Campillo, by male physician González-Enríquez, and by Soto and Pérez.²¹ More than focusing on the differences of the programs and editorials about sex education, because all the texts analysed in this chapter promoted sex education, I would like to analyse the similarities that they had in their constructions of gender and sexuality. Foucault explains that there can exist “different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy,” furthermore “they can, on the

¹⁸ Other physicians supporting this opinion were Manuel Guevara Oropeza, Leopoldo Salazar Viniegra, Mario Fuentes, Edunto Buentello, José Quevedo, Antonio Monzón and Enrique Bulman. All worked in the Mental Hospital of Mixcoac. ‘La Opinión de Los Psiquiatras Sobre Educación Sexual’, *El Nacional*, 2 July 1933, 1. Matilde Rodríguez Cabo (1902-1967) graduated from medicine in 1929 at UNAM and received a scholarship by the Alexander Von Humboldt Society to study psychiatry in Berlin. She translated to Spanish Carl Gustav Jung's *Simbolik des Geiste*, and the correspondence of Sigmund Freud with Oskar Pfister. While studying in Berlin, the Mexican government commissioned her to visit the USSR to study the protection of children in that country. She was the first woman psychiatrist in Mexico and worked for the establishment of the Children's Pavillon in the General Mental Hospital of la Castañeda in 1932. She was a feminist and a socialist and formed part of the Sole Front for Women's Rights (FUPDM). She advocated the depenalization of abortion for economic reasons. Rodríguez Cabo was also an active collaborator of the magazine *Eugenesia* published by SEM, association where she gave many lectures as well. Sosenski and Sosenski, ‘En Defensa de Los Niños Y Las Mujeres’; Suárez y López Guazo, *Eugenesia Y Racismo En México*, 239.

¹⁹ ‘Educación Sexual Solo Desde Las Secundarias’, 1.

²⁰ ‘Que El Educando Pida Explicaciones Y No Que El Mentor Las Ofrezca’, 1–2.

²¹ Of SEP program I only encounter that studied for sixth grade. All the mentioned programs are transcribed, in my own translation, in Annex 1.

contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy.”²² I would like to analyse discourses in favour of sex education, as containing the same strategy; to explore how, in Foucault’s terms, they were promoting particular understandings of reality based on a specific knowledge that legitimized particular power relations.²³ I believe this way of exploring gender and sexuality can show whether or not the conceptions that opponents of sexual education were different from those of the proponents.

Actors in favour of sex education based their legitimacy to intervene on the topic of sex education on scientific knowledge, but, as argued in chapter 1, scientific knowledge is not sealed off from the values of the society in which it is produced. Therefore, I am interested in the ideas of gender and sexuality that this scientific strategy reproduced and actively reshaped. Sex education advocates in Mexico often invoked authors like Sigmund Freud, Bertrand Russell, Havelock Ellis, Alfred Adler, Jean Alfred Fournier, Gregorio Marañón, Adolphe Pinard and Auguste Forel.²⁴ They thought sex education was a marker of progress and civilization²⁵ and were proud to support a world trend that aimed to introduce scientific instruction in sexual matters.²⁶ Consequently, they regarded the lack of sex education in Mexico as a sign of backwardness. For example teacher Francisco Ascano in 1934 mentioned that Europe (Spain, France, Italy and Germany) was in the vanguard of the movement for sex

²² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction*, 102.

²³ *Ibid.*, 100–2.

²⁴ Rafael López, ‘La Educación Sexual’, *El Nacional*, 5 May 1933, sec. Editorial; Pedro de Alba, ‘Sobre La Educación Sexual. No Enturbiar El Tema’, *El Nacional*, 18 June 1933, sec. Editorial; Pedro Zuloaga, ‘¿Qué Es Educación Sexual?’, *El Nacional*, 17 September 1933, sec. Editorial; Alejandro Aragón, ‘La Niñez Ante El Sexo’, *Excélsior*, 27 May 1933, sec. Editorial; A. de Montalvo, ‘Ideario Neoyorquino’, *El Nacional*, 16 February 1934; Juan L. Soto and A. Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana. Libro Para Los Padres Y Los Maestros* (Mexico: Patria, 1933).

²⁵ Narciso Bassols, ‘Nada Hay Aun Sobre La Educación Sexual’, *El Nacional*, 10 January 1934, 8; ‘La Diatriba Sobre Educación Sexual’, *El Nacional*, 4 August 1933, sec. Editorial; de Montalvo, ‘Ideario Neoyorquino’.

²⁶ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 248. Celia A. del Campillo gave some declarations in this sense. ‘Correspondencia de Excélsior’, *Excélsior*, 19 June 1933, sec. Editorial, 7.

education as well as in the Americas (the United States, Canada, Chile and Argentina); and urged Mexico to join this scientific and socially progressive movement.²⁷ In a world perceived in competitive and sometimes racial terms, an editorial in *El Nacional* from 1933 showed concern that the lack of sex education converted male Mexicans into “weak fighters, in front of other races and nations where such prejudices had been erased long time ago.”²⁸

6.2. Sex education and biopolitics

Supporters of sex education, including the SEP, considered that the proper development of the sexual instinct from childhood was necessary not just for the individual’s wellbeing but for society’s as well.²⁹ I view this intention to intervene in the lives of children as future citizens as part of a biopolitical project that aimed at the management of socially constructed male and female behavioural conduct.³⁰ The SEP³¹ thus argued that sex education was more than sexual hygiene and sexual information and should include “habit formation, prophylaxis, conduct norms, mental attitudes and the channelling of the [sexual] instinct,” to produce “the correct habits that we all aspire to.” As sexuality was part of a vital and social

²⁷ Francisco Ascanio, ‘Educación Sexual. Salud, Vida Y Felicidad’, *El Nacional*, 31 March 1934, sec. Editorial, 5. In this article Ascanio refers to countries with different political projects, like the socialist oriented Republic in Spain, and fascists Germany and Italy. Many Latin Americans at this period looked at European countries as the bearers of “civilization” and were not always critical of social and political developments there. In fact, Urías Horcasitas argues that the Mexican state in the 1930s adopted elements of socialism, fascism and national socialism in its organization without fully developing a totalitarian state. Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 36–7.

²⁸ This editorial does not refer explicitly to what exactly “those prejudices” were. But the author mentions the need to liberate Mexicans from old ideas and to teach reproduction in a scientific way, opposed to religious prudishness and ignorance. ‘La Diatriba Sobre Educación Sexual’, 3.

²⁹ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 14–29; Aragón, ‘La Niñez Ante El Sexo’, 5; Zuloaga, ‘¿Qué Es Educación Sexual?’, 3; ‘La Opinión de Los Psiquiatras Sobre Educación Sexual’, 1–2; Pedro Gringoire, ‘El Pulso de Los Tiempos. Más Comentarios Sobre Educación Sexual. El Instinto Y La Niñez. ¿Bestias U Hombres?’, *Excelsior*, 8 June 1933, sec. Editorial, 5.

³⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction*, 139–47.

³¹ From the foreword of the sex education project elaborated by teachers José Arturo Pichardo, César Ruíz and Luis Hidalgo Monroy and physician Alfonso Pruneda. Bassols, ‘Nada Hay Aun Sobre La Educación Sexual’.

problem, it concerned people of all ages. Thus, the SEP declared, sex education should “start with the birth and finish with death,” but it should be suitable for its specific audience. Sex education as any education belonged to both parents and the school, but the SEP observed the school had to intervene because up until now parents did not give sexual information to children and children acquired knowledge in this area from undesirable sources that provided them with dangerous or false information, and in many cases, in the wrong way.³² As a summary the SEP argued, sex education should contain two fundamental aspects: 1. “The adequate information about sexual activity, and equally, about the origin of life and the transmission of life through generations;” and 2. “Suitable training habits regarding sex and the marking of standards of conduct in relation to it from an individual and social standpoint.”³³

In the opinion of sex education advocates, many social problems existed because of the lack of sex education. Teacher Francisco Ascano dramatically argued it produced “[i]nfant mortality... women’s hysteria, neurasthenia in the young of both sexes, hereditary illness, race degeneration, alcoholism, the use of drugs, suicide, marital conflicts, the vices present in the young of both sexes since they started in Sodom and Gomorrah, and widespread demoralization in contemporary society.”³⁴ If society was to avoid all of those

³² For example, Alfredo Saavedra SEM’s president said that when children did not receive information regarding reproduction from their parents and teachers it was likely they will receive this information from friends or servants but that unfortunately these knowledge was given in a secret and malicious way that contributed to the current hypocrisy in sexual matters. He also pointed that it was impossible to hide the knowledge on reproduction as children could observe their mother’s pregnancies and become curious on the issue. All these ideas were commonly reproduced among advocates of sex education. Alfredo M. Saavedra, ‘La Educación Sexual En Las Escuelas Y En El Hogar’, in *Eugenesía Y Medicina Social*. (Mexico City, 1934), 24–5.

³³ Bassols, ‘Nada Hay Aun Sobre La Educación Sexual’, 8. All quotes from sources originally in Spanish are my own translation unless otherwise specified.

³⁴ Ascano, ‘Educación Sexual. Salud, Vida Y Felicidad’, 3.

evils by the introduction of sex education, what kind of content should it have, or in other words, what were those “correct habits” that advocates recommended?

6.3. Gendered content of sex education

Some Mexican eugenicists believed they had a mission in the best interest of the children to promote the improvement of the “race.” To do so it was necessary to wake up the conscience of parenthood, masculine and feminine.³⁵ For men, conscious parenthood meant to fulfil their role as breadwinners and to provide a healthy genetic stock free from venereal diseases or “deviations.”³⁶ Women should contribute to conscious parenthood by devoting their lives to the care of their children and to introduce new scientific knowledge to improve the “race.” I will analyse these eugenic notions that impregnated the programs of sex education for boys and girls in this section.

6.3.1. Sex education for boys: preventing venereal diseases

The most salient aspect in the sex education for boys was the prevention of venereal diseases. The campaign first encouraged boys to delay the beginning of sexual activities to the

³⁵ Saavedra, ‘La Educación Sexual En Las Escuelas Y En El Hogar’, 22.

³⁶ Many newspaper articles and editorials mentioned venereal diseases or “deviation of the sexual instinct” or both as something that needed to be prevented through sex education. See: Zuloaga, ‘¿Qué Es Educación Sexual?’, 3; Leonor Llach, ‘La Etica de La Educación Sexual’, *El Nacional*, 3 June 1933, sec. Editorial, 3; ‘La Educación Sexual Debe Establecerse’, *El Nacional*, 27 May 1933, 2; Pedro de Alba, ‘Sobre La Educación Sexual. Higiene Psiquico Biológica Y Superación Moral’, *El Nacional*, 26 June 1933, sec. Editorial, 3; ‘El Dr. Alfonso Millan Dijo Una Conferencia Sobre Educación Sexual’, 2; Guillermo De Luzuriaga, ‘Conclusiones Al Margen de La Debatida Educación Sexual’, *El Nacional*, 11 January 1934, sec. Editorial, 5; Ascanio, ‘Educación Sexual. Salud, Vida Y Felicidad’, 3; ‘La Educación Sexual Y El Lic. Bassols.’, *El Nacional*, 24 May 1933, 5; de Alba, ‘Sobre La Educación Sexual. No Enturbiar El Tema’, 3; Tomás Ramírez, ‘Eugenia Y Eugenesia’, *El Nacional*, 12 August 1933, sec. Editorial, 3; Mauricio Magdaleno, ‘Nada Más Que La Verdad’, *El Nacional*, 13 March 1934, sec. Editorial, 5; ‘Interesantes Discusiones En Veracruz’, 2. Also Alfredo M. Saavedra, SEM president in a Lecture given in Mexico City in 1932 as part of the National Congress of parents, expressed that sex education will serve to prevent the “deviations,” illness related to sex, masturbation and to provide a prophylaxis for venereal diseases in boys, and to provide the knowledge of puericulture and to wake up the maternal instinct in girls. Saavedra, ‘La Educación Sexual En Las Escuelas Y En El Hogar’.

maximum and taught them prophylaxis of venereal diseases.³⁷ To prevent men from engaging early in sexual activities, Soto and Pérez allowed some inaccurate information to remain unchallenged, for example the idea that men only achieved full development of their genital organs after their mid-twenties, and that premature sexual experiences caused fatigue and affected the quality and longevity of future sexual activity.³⁸ Nevertheless Soto and Pérez recognized that abstinence for men was too difficult to achieve, although it was possible under special physical, intellectual, and cultural conditions. Based on information from his male students in the “Adolescence’s Hygiene” class at the National Preparatory High School, or ENP, González-Enríquez³⁹ expressed that it was naïve to expect that young men would not engage in sexual activities before marriage, and were very likely to visit a prostitute.⁴⁰ He found in his research that many students had their first encounter with prostitutes during the first years of secondary school, many times encouraged by elder students, to the point that many of them already had sexually transmitted diseases or STDs.⁴¹ Alarmed by this situation, physician Ortiz Armengol argued in favour of school-based sex education, which, to society’s embarrassment, had up until this point been “given by prostitutes!”⁴²

Visiting prostitutes necessitated the risk for men to contract STDs. Syphilis and gonorrhoea were the ones that worried Mexican physicians most. These illness, physicians argued, bad in themselves, furthermore had the risk to contaminate others if the adequate

³⁷ Another aspect in the education of boys was the prevention of sexual “deviations,” which I will develop in section 6.5.2.

³⁸ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 142.

³⁹ González-Enríquez gave this class since 1931 and he used the information received from his students to propose a program of sex education. Raúl González-Enríquez, ‘Orientaciones Y Programa Para La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Secundaria Mexicana’, *Gaceta Médica de México*, 1 November 1933, 499–519.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 513.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 509–12.

⁴² Federico Ortiz Armengol, ‘Qué Es La Educación Sexual? II’, *El Nacional*, 17 August 1984, 3.

treatment was not followed.⁴³ The panorama regarding STDs Soto and Pérez offered was alarming.⁴⁴ Syphilis was the worse because it could be transmitted to the child and affect him/her in three ways. 1. It could cause him/her death. 2. The child could present the same symptoms as adults. 3. Even if not manifested it was believed it transferred something called heredity-syphilis, affecting up to two generations. An array of bad conditions were attributed to it, from “foetus malformations,” “feminism,” “epilepsy,” “hysteria”, “mental weakness,” “neurosis,” “perversions,” and “criminality” among many others.⁴⁵ Syphilis, for all the evils attached to it, represented not only individual tragedies but also problems for the family and the community. For the homeland, Soto and Pérez declared, syphilis meant “stopping its moral and economic development; the decadence of the race, the diminishing of birth rates and depopulation.”⁴⁶ Thus sex education was important for the well-being of the community and therefore a responsibility of the revolutionary government. In the opinion of one editorialist it was more important than the prudishness and the bad faith of opponents.⁴⁷

If abstinence was not possible, Soto and Pérez suggested a detailed prophylaxis before, during and after a sexual act with prostitutes.⁴⁸ It was also suggested that a man should

⁴³ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 159–60.

⁴⁴ They dedicated 74 pages of their book solely to explain the characteristics, consequences and treatment of Syphilis, Gonorrhoea and Chancroid. *Ibid.*, 144–217.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 176–80. Other authors in favour of sex education shared Soto and Pérez concern about syphilis. For example Mauricio Magdaleno presented the following data to manifest the need for sex education: “Mortality for syphilis seven times higher than in the United States; sick from syphilis 60 percent of the [adult male?] inhabitants; 18 000 out of 20 000 prostitutes in Mexico city recognized as syphilitic; 30 percent of the population between fifteen and twenty-five endure syphilis or other venereal diseases; 38 percent of madness cases originated for this cause.” Magaleno said this data was from the Department of Public Health. Magdaleno, ‘Nada Más Que La Verdad’, 5.

⁴⁶ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 181.

⁴⁷ Magdaleno, ‘Nada Más Que La Verdad’, 5.

⁴⁸ Their recommendations were as follows. Before the sexual act, they recommended a close revision of the woman and to demand her to wash her body. During the sexual act, they advised to use a rubber preservative or condom and to “do it quickly, without worrying to do it well.” The more time they spent in the sexual act the more chance men had to catch an infection. For this reason, Soto and Pérez posited that it was not necessary to prolong the act to give pleasure to their companion, because what she really wanted

go directly to a doctor if he noticed any physical change or symptoms.⁴⁹ The term “prostitute” included many women for Soto and Pérez, who warned their readers against “disguised professionals” that included women workers, employees, and women students from superior schools who occasionally engaged in prostitution.⁵⁰ Accordingly, Soto and Pérez urged men to follow the advised prophylaxis with all women, because “outside of marriage, apart from *your own woman*,” all women could have STDs.⁵¹ Soto and Pérez said that it was not necessary to repeat this advice for women, because the woman that “plays the role of man, that is, to go coldly to choose a man, is happily still an exception.”⁵² For this reason they concluded, in the prevention of STDs, sex education should be directed only to men who had a responsibility to keep healthy for their families and the nation. They also considered sex education more important than the prenuptial certificate.⁵³

6.3.2. Sex education for girls: chastity and motherhood

While abstinence before marriage sounded nearly impossible for men, it was the rule for women. Gonzalez-Enríquez asserted that virginity was the most important virtue in a woman.

was only the money she was going to receive.⁴⁸ After sex, they suggested first for them to wash themselves, avoiding any contact with towels or the woman’s clothes, and then to inject protargol (silver proteinate) in the urethra for the duration of five minutes which should be followed by rubbing their genitals for 10 minutes with calomel cream (mercurous chloride). With the suggestion to hurry the sexual act and the complicated procedures to prevent venereal diseases, physicians actually counselled men to spend more time on the prevention of venereal disease than on getting sexual satisfaction. Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 222-31. Quote from page 226.

⁴⁹ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 227–31.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 144–5 The SEM had a different position on prostitution. They were abolitionist and believed that the government should stop the system of regulation and instead implement sex education campaigns. They also denounced the condition of slavery in which many prostitutes lived. The SEM defended that a woman “is free to carry out her sexual function, as long as she is not considered a professional, within the private sphere”. This position to accept women’s use of their sexuality without mediation of marriage was quite revolutionary at the time. ‘Sugestión de La S. Eugénica a Los Padres de Familia’, *El Nacional*, 4 August 1933, 7.

⁵¹ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 219. Italics are mine.

⁵² Nevertheless they suggested for the exceptional woman a vaginal wash. *Ibid.*, 231.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

He associated this with the value given to Virgin Mary, Jesus's mother in Catholic faith, which made virginity a symbol of purity for women in Mexican culture.⁵⁴ But González-Enriquez and Soto and Pérez were afraid that this feminine virtue was in danger due to the social changes and the bad influence of cinema and media. González-Enriquez argued that men (in marriage) were in their right to ask “anatomic integrity” from a woman in order to keep their honour intact.⁵⁵ Making it evident that in the 1930s in Mexico virginity was a demand for women to enter marriage.⁵⁶ Soto and Pérez suggested sex education for women should “provide a vigorous shield against the multiple solicitations of modern life.”⁵⁷ Thus sex education should serve the goal to keep women chaste before marriage. Attached to the value of virginity was an encouragement of women's modesty (*pudor*), which would prevent a woman from losing her virginity. Soto and Pérez described modesty as “the most excellent of feminine virtues.”⁵⁸ These examples from male physicians show that the declared intention of sex education to liberate people from old prejudices did not include women. More interestingly they used religious ideas in order to defend traditional roles for women. The figure of the Virgin Mary was invoked as a symbol to perpetuate the “ideal” behaviours of women. The use of symbols, according to Scott, is an important element in the construction

⁵⁴ González-Enriquez, ‘Orientaciones Y Programa Para La Educación Sexual’, 503.

⁵⁵ González-Enriquez included himself among the men that gave great importance to virginity. *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Nonetheless González-Enriquez was very concerned that even this “anatomic integrity” may not be sufficient proof of a woman's purity, because as some examples from literature have shown, like *Les Demi-Vierges* by Marcel Prévost, some women could have their hymen untouched but have had licentious romantic lives, considered unacceptable for women. I think González-Enriquez refers to practises like kissing or petting. *Ibid.*, 504.

⁵⁷ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 143. A good example of how sex education for women was to reinforce, chastity was a movie: “What price Innocence?” Exhibited in New York and reviewed by *El Nacional*. To girls were the protagonists of the movie. One who did not receive sex education was seduced and desperate end up committing suicide. The other girls whose mother has explained her the important issues of sexuality is protected against the seduction of boys. ‘Una Película Sensacional Se Exhibe En Nueva York’, *El Nacional*, 27 June 1933, sec. segunda, 4.

⁵⁸ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 58.

of gender.⁵⁹ These male physicians showed that they advocated two very different paths for men and women to provide a healthy breed for future generations; women should stay virgins before marriage which was constructed as a precondition of men's honour. Women's chastity also secured that women were free from STDs to become healthy mothers. Men on the other hand should be free from STDs for some years through abstinence and later with the help of prophylaxis.⁶⁰ Because men's abstinence before marriage was thought as too difficult to achieve, these male physicians advocated not only a system of double morals for men and women, they also sustained a classist division of women that kept male privilege in society intact. Middle-class women should keep their virginity to enter marriage and some lower-class women should offer men sexual satisfaction outside of marriage through prostitution.⁶¹

The promotion of motherhood was the most important aspect in the sex education of girls, in which girls should learn all the scientific knowledge related to this function. Both SEP's and Soto and Pérez programs for girls in sixth grade provided them with knowledge on puericulture, the eugenic branch specializing in the care of children.⁶² These programs emphasised how venereal diseases could be transmitted to children, how hygienic measures could benefit children's and mother's health, and highlighted the importance of nutrition. Education was thought to provide girls with the tools to fulfil their assigned social responsibility as mothers. The emphasis on women as mothers and men as breadwinners should encourage them to fulfil their expected roles in society, which Pérez and Soto

⁵⁹ Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', 1067.

⁶⁰ As will be explored in section 6.5.2., some male physicians believed that prostitution was a "necessary evil," less damaging than masturbation because it would prevent the young men "deviation" of the sexual instinct.

⁶¹ Although I think that poor women were more vulnerable to enter prostitution that does not mean that all poor women were prostitutes. The model of chastity before marriage, even if a value of middle- and upper-classes, was supposed to reach the majority of women.

⁶² See Annex 1 for the programs.

defended with allusion to the Bible. They referred Genesis, where the man and then the woman were created by God, and said that for once religious texts and scientific research coincided in the complementary nature of the sexes.⁶³

This promotion of a scientific oriented motherhood was supported by physicians and the government, which showed a strong interest in what were seen as population problems.⁶⁴ An example of this was a book for Mexican mothers published in June 1933 by physicians Manuel Martínez Báez, et al.,⁶⁵ with practical advices for mothers about hygiene, diet and illness prevention that they should execute to prevent child mortality and to strengthen the “race”. The book was said to be an initiative of the president’s wife, Mrs. Aida S. de Rodríguez.⁶⁶ In her view, there did not exist a book in Spanish that explained in an easy way mother’s and children’s care. For this reason Mrs. Rodríguez took this mission into her own hands, deciding to publish it. Any mother who was interested in the book could go to Mrs. Rodríguez’s house and pick up a copy of the book for free. An article in *El Nacional* on 4 June 1933, which reported this information, described Mrs. Rodríguez as a selfless and modest mother who believed that taking care of children was the highest mission of a woman, and described the home as the seat of honour of Mexican mothers. The authors of the book

⁶³ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 27–8.

⁶⁴ Concerns about population problems took to the highest level of government. In March 1933 the Mexican Committee for the Study of Population Problems was constituted under the patronage of President Abelardo L. Rodríguez. The intention of this Committee was to provide the government with scientific guidelines for demographic policies based on eugenic and anthropologic studies. Some issues for study were the causes for the diminishing of natality, the qualitative and quantitative deficiencies in the population, infant mortality, immigration, fecundity in “mix-race” groups, and the “formation of new races.” ‘Se Estudiarán Los Problemas Relativos a La Población’, *El Nacional*, 10 March 1933.

⁶⁵ The other authors were: Francisco de P. Miranda, Mario P. Torrella y Manuel Cárdenas de la Vega. ‘Libro Para La Madre Mexicana’, *El Nacional*, 4 June 1933, 7.

⁶⁶ In this long newspaper article, only the words in which Mrs. Rodríguez dedicated the book to all Mexican mothers, were written by her. The rest was written by an anonymous author, part of the staff of *El Nacional*. *Ibid.*, 7.

believed that Mexican mothers had all the good-will to raise their children but sometimes due to ignorance, prejudice or superstition, mothers influenced them in a negative way. The government believed every mother's help was needed to improve the health of children so that mothers could offer the nation "men suitable for work and true motives for our national pride."⁶⁷ They added that the Mexican child grows and develops better than the European child in the first months of life but that soon the Mexican child loses that advantage due to malnutrition or preventable illness. For this reason they wanted to bring the benefits of scientific knowledge to Mexican mothers in an accessible way.⁶⁸ The health of Mexican children was important for the government but male children were emphasised, in order to create male workers that mothers should dedicate their mission to their children. Physicians promoted, in accordance with the first lady, the ideal of femininity, in this sense both general Rodríguez and Mrs. Rodríguez represented the ideal family of the nation (See image 1). By glorifying the figure of the mother, physicians, educational institutions and the government reinforced the idea that women's social function was maternity and that women's service to the nation consisted in the healthy upbringing of generations of men.

⁶⁷ 'Libro Para La Madre Mexicana'.

⁶⁸ Ibid.



Image 1. Mrs. Aida S. de Rodríguez with her children Juan Abelardo, Julio Fernando and Abelardo. *El Nacional*, 11 June 1933.

6.4. The ideal of sexual differentiation: constructing sexual difference

An ideal often expressed by supporters of sex education was that sex education should encourage a greater differentiation of the sexes.⁶⁹ For this reason they endorsed sex education segregated by sex, with gender specific content.⁷⁰ In fact, this was the reason why the SEP's

⁶⁹ This idea was expressed by Soto and Pérez, Tomás Ramírez and students in Veracruz. Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*; Ramírez, 'Eugenia Y Eugenesia'; 'Interesantes Discusiones En Veracruz', 2.

⁷⁰ In this period in Mexico coeducation was a polemic issue. A program of sex education equal for both sexes given in mixed groups was unthinkable, and I did not find any evidence of such opinions.

CTC opposed coeducation, because it would interfere with the objective of “preparing individuals for the acceptance of their social duties,” which were understood in gendered terms.⁷¹ A quote from Spanish physician Gregorio Marañón,⁷² presented by Soto and Pérez exemplifies this goal; it said that the objective of sex education was “to make man more masculine and woman more feminine.”⁷³

In their 1933 book *La educación sexual*, Soto and Pérez presented Marañón’s theory of “intersexuality,” which provides a deeper understanding of why sexual differentiation was constructed as an ideal.⁷⁴ It stated that the perfect male and female in a biological sense were only an ideal, but individuals of both sexes had characteristics of the other sex that went from the hermaphrodite to infinite variations (combinations of male and female characteristics) that resulted in the common man and woman. For this reason every individual had within

⁷¹ ‘Las Ventajas de La Coeducación Y Sus Peligros’, *El Nacional*, 25 May 1933, 1. During the Congress of Nurse and Midwives in January 1933 in Mexico City, philosophy professor Osvaldo Robles expressed a similar opinion. He referred to Stanley Hall, professor at Johns Hopkins University, who indicated that boys may lose their toughness and virility in coeducational schools. ‘Es Nociva La Coeducación’, *El Nacional*, 9 January 1933, 2.

⁷² Marañón was a Spanish physician who was a leader of the sex reform movement in Spain and an outstanding endocrinologist in that country. Marañón was the most influential physician in the social medicine movement in Spain and advocated a soft version of eugenics aimed at the protection of women and children through health policies.

For studies about Marañón and the influence that he had in the construction of gender in Spain see: Nerea Aresti, *Médicos, Donjuanes Y Mujeres Modernas. Los Ideales de Femenidad Y Masculinidad En El Primer Tercio Del Siglo XX* (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2001); Thomas F. Glick, ‘Marañón, Intersexuality and the Biological Construction of Gender in 1920s Spain’, *Cronos* 8, no. 1 (2005): 121–37; Ramón Castejón Bolea, ‘Marañón Y La Identidad Sexual: Biología, Sexualidad Y Género En La España de La Década de 1920’, *ARBOR Ciencia, Pensamiento Y Cultura* 189–759 (February 2013): 1–9.

⁷³ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 73.

⁷⁴ Marañón’s ideas were popular in Mexico in the 1930s. Soto and Pérez in their book referred many times to Marañón’s work, as will be explored later in this chapter. In their Bibliography Soto and Pérez referenced Marañón’s books, *Tres ensayos sobre la vida sexual* (1926). Marañón was also mentioned by several newspaper articles and editorials and a book published by Alfredo Saavedra, SEM’s president. R. Sánchez de Ocaña, ‘El Doctor Marañón. Osadías Sobre La Timidez’, *El Nacional*, 10 February 1933; Mateo Solano y Gutiérrez, ‘Nuevamente Amiel, El Eterno Hijo En Busca de Madre’, *El Nacional*, 28 January 1933; José Miguel Bejarano, ‘La Timidez Como Super Autoestimación’, *El Nacional*, 5 August 1933, sec. Editorial; de Alba, ‘Sobre La Educación Sexual. No Enturbiar El Tema’; Alfredo M. Saavedra, *Eugenésia Y Medicina Social*. (Mexico City, 1934), 7.

her/himself a remnant of the other sex. Marañón called this “intersexuality.”⁷⁵ This radical theory in which all humans were in a way intersexuals was formulated in an evolutionist frame that saw sexual differentiation as a marker of progress. Soto and Pérez explained that “it is in inferior species where there are specimens that reunite both sexes. The perfecting of the species is shown by a higher degree of individualization [sexual differentiation]. Humanity is still in a period of sexual backwardness, its perfecting will consist in a trend towards a more categorical segregation of the sexes.”⁷⁶ Marañón argued that to mature every individual “must suffocate the phantom of the other sex in him/herself.”⁷⁷ The evolutionist frame of Marañón’s theory also included a gender component in which women’s bodies and psyches were considered as less developed than those of men.⁷⁸

If the evolution consisted in sexual differentiation, for Soto and Pérez, it followed that every individual should aspire to the prototype of femininity or masculinity. For this reason they argued that contemporary men and women rejected as “nature’s monster, any individual whose morphological characteristics showed an uncertain sexual type, and as an aberration of the spirit all instinct deviations to individuals of the same sex.”⁷⁹ Marañón’s theory of “intersexuality” presented by Soto and Pérez is an example of how science, as argued by

⁷⁵ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 72. For more info on Marañón’s theory of intersexuality, see: Glick, ‘Marañón, Intersexuality and the Biological Construction of Gender in 1920s Spain’.

⁷⁶ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 72–3.

⁷⁷ Glick, ‘Marañón, Intersexuality and the Biological Construction of Gender in 1920s Spain’.

⁷⁸ Glick traces the influence of Darwinian theories in the work of marañón. *Ibid.*, 124. One of these evolutionist theories was “recapitulation”, which Aresti explains in the following way: the development of an individual reproduced or re-enacted the history of humanity where certain individuals in the present represented lower phases of development, in which the white middle or upper-class man represented the highest point of development. White women and men and women of other “races” represented an incomplete state in the development of the species. Aresti, *Médicos, Donjuanes Y Mujeres Modernas*, 60. Both, Aresti and Glick coincide that Marañón did not reflected in his work ideas of race.

⁷⁹ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 71. The issue of “deviation” of the sexual instinct will be analysed in section 6.5.2.

Fausto-Sterling, played an active role in constructing the male/female dichotomy.⁸⁰ To reinforce the ideal characteristics of each sex Soto and Pérez presented Marañón's list of functional primary and secondary sexual characteristics.⁸¹ For example, in the functional primary sexual characteristics, Marañón established that the libido was directed at the opposite sex and that feminine orgasm was slow and not necessary for reproduction while male's was quick and necessary. In the secondary characteristics Marañón established that women had a maternal instinct, were more sensible and therefore less apt for abstract thinking and creativity, and had lower physical abilities. Men in contrast had the instinct of social action, which helped them to defend and promote the wellbeing of their home; his creativity and capacity for abstract thinking outweighed their sensibility and had greater physical abilities.⁸² Marañón believed that "all secondary sexual characteristics, whether biological or psychological, were determined by hormonal make up."⁸³ This list of functional primary and secondary sexual characteristic served the purpose of defining the physical, mental and social capabilities of men and women in a scientific way. It is an example of normative ideals –an important element in the construction of gender, according to Scott –that contributed to the construction of gender expressed in medicine, which tried to contain what it was to be a "man" and a "woman" in Mexico in the 1930s.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*.

⁸¹ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 74–75. Soto and Pérez included the scheme of Marañón's anatomic and functional primary and secondary sexual characters in pages 74 and 75 and explained them from page 76 to 94.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸³ Glick, 'Marañón, Intersexuality and the Biological Construction of Gender in 1920s Spain', 122.

⁸⁴ Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', 1067.

6.5. “Ideal” and “deviant” forms of sexuality

6.5.1. The supreme perfection of human sexuality

For Soto and Pérez it was important to explain the “normal” development of the libido to understand the “abnormal” ones.⁸⁵ To this purpose, they presented Marañón’s theory of “normal” sexual development, which explained that the libido went through an evolutionary process. In the child it was unspecific about the object, from this primitive bisexuality the individual evolved towards a sexual attraction to the opposite sex, usually during puberty when the sexual glands achieved their full development. This period was called *animal phase*. Later the man’s libido was directed towards a group of women that had certain characteristics in common. The maximum differentiation was achieved when a man focused his libido on only one woman, which at the same time, Soto and Pérez’ argued would result in the repulsion of the same sex as an object of the libido. The ideal differentiation of the libido was represented by the permanent monogamous heterosexual love that was called “the supreme perfection of human sexuality.”⁸⁶

6.5.2. “Psychic inversion” and homosexuality

Homosexuality, and other variations from the ideal of heterosexual femininity and masculinity were understood by Soto and Pérez as an uncomplete development of the libido. The lack of observance of the expected gender characteristics was called “psychic inversion,” which in men manifested itself by their choosing occupations like dressmaker, masseur, hairdresser, perfumer; developing non-productive interests like the arts; or having excessive

⁸⁵ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 121–3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

sentimentality. In women “psychic inversion” manifested from childhood in their lack of interest in playing with dolls and their interest in male activities. This was termed “virile protest” because these women aspired to virility as “the superior human type,” producing neurosis. In Soto and Pérez’s opinion, women affected by “virile protest” wanted to replace men in professional and sportive activities and tended to have a dominant role in their marriages.⁸⁷

Like the many examples referred to above, homosexuality was described in negative terms by advocates of sex education. It was referred to as “deviation,”⁸⁸ “perversion,”⁸⁹ “sexual aberration,”⁹⁰ “monstrous manifestations of the sexual instinct,”⁹¹ or the more neutral term “homosexuality.”⁹² Proponents of sex education believed that one of the missions of sex education was to prevent the appearance of homosexuality. Soto and Pérez relied on Marañón’s theories of sexual development and “intersexuality” to explain how homosexuality emerged. Although they were particularly interested in male homosexuality, they also provided information about female homosexuality.

According to Marañón there were two normal (or physiological) intersexual phases: adolescence for men and menopause for women. Soto and Pérez were especially concerned for young boys who passed through a feminine phase and could be the object of sexual advances from “pervert abnormal persons of the same sex or seduction from adult women,”⁹³

⁸⁷ Ibid., 136–8.

⁸⁸ Llach, ‘La Etica de La Educación Sexual’, 3; Saavedra, ‘La Educación Sexual En Las Escuelas Y En El Hogar’, 28; de Alba, ‘Sobre La Educación Sexual. Higiene Psiquico Biológica Y Superación Moral’, 3.

⁸⁹ ‘La Educación Sexual Debe Establecerse’, 2.

⁹⁰ ‘El Dr. Alfonso Millan Dijo Una Conferencia Sobre Educación Sexual’.

⁹¹ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 19.

⁹² Zuloaga, ‘¿Qué Es Educación Sexual?’, 3; De Luzuriaga, ‘Conclusiones Al Margen de La Debatida Educación Sexual’, 3; Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 116.

⁹³ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 111.

which could interrupt the “normal” development of the male teenage libido, producing homosexuality. If this happened the male libido was directed towards other men but conserved its distinction as active. Perez and Soto referred in a negative way to “passive homosexuals” whom they called “prostituted.”⁹⁴

Older women went through a process that Soto and Perez called “virilisation.” If this “virilisation” was extreme, their eroticism could turn to women. In other cases it just resulted in more bodily hair, fat in areas not considered feminine, like shoulders, neck and face, a lower voice, the inclination to act in the public sphere and at the same time their emotional nature became more equilibrated. Because “virilisation” was conceptualized as negative, Soto and Pérez relieved the reader by saying that very feminine women, those with a great maternal instinct, were nearly or totally free from this kind of virilisation.⁹⁵

Homosexuality in women was determined by the position their libido occupied in a spectrum from infantile to virile. If this libido was infantile, oscillating and passive, women became spinsters without children and cultivated close friendships with other women that most of the time did not culminate in erotic manifestations because religious beliefs helped to stop them.⁹⁶ The other kind of homosexual women were those with a virile libido, who tended more often to establish lesbian relationships. Soto and Pérez noted that the characteristic that distinguished both types of homosexual women was “the weakness or total lack of maternal instinct.”⁹⁷ Consequently, they concluded “a woman who is also a mother or who has a maternal instinct will never become homosexual.”⁹⁸ In their view, the mother

⁹⁴ Ibid., 124.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 114.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 130.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 131.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

was “the perfect type of feminine sexuality because it satisfies the sexual ideal: reproduction.”⁹⁹

Soto and Pérez suggested the prophylaxis of homosexuality and psychic inversion. They thought that external factors were crucial in the appearance of homosexuality and for this reason they believed a lot could be done to avoid or to correct it.¹⁰⁰ Education was fundamental in the prevention of homosexuality. They were especially concerned with male homosexuality. For boys they suggested that education should emphasize masculinity from early childhood. Masculinity should be evident in the choice of clothes, games, toys, and the stories boys were told, highlighting adventures, expeditions, discoveries and inventions among other things. The objective was to teach the boy his role as producer, and that his normal condition was to work. They also suggested that boys be prevented from becoming “mama’s boys,” because this could result in narcissism. Narcissism would lead to onanism (masturbation) and onanism was considered an underlying factor of homosexuality both in boys and girls. They also suggested strong supervision in schools and were against boarding schools because they regarded these as fostering onanism and propagating other “sexual anomalies.” This connection that physicians believed to exist between onanism and homosexuality made some authors advise against the evil of masturbation, which was considered damaging and antisocial.¹⁰¹ Thus, sex education should include the prevention of masturbation that was often referred to as “solitary vices.”¹⁰² González Enríquez, for example, considered masturbation as a more injurious practice for boys than to go to a

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 116.

¹⁰¹ Zuloaga, ‘¿Qué Es Educación Sexual?’, 3.

¹⁰² De Luzuriaga, ‘Conclusiones Al Margen de La Debatida Educación Sexual’, 5. Saavedra, ‘La Educación Sexual En Las Escuelas Y En El Hogar’, 28.

prostitute.¹⁰³ Other suggestions regarding boys' education were to avoid the suggestion that sex was a mysterious thing full of sins and dangers and to teach boys to postpone the beginning of sexual life as long as possible, and that real masculinity did not consist of sexual achievements.¹⁰⁴ For women, Soto and Pérez considered prophylaxis was not that necessary as long as “*naturally*, pedagogical principles and ethical norms are directed to educate her as future mother, to display her femininity in an environment free of unhealthy seductions.”¹⁰⁵

If male homosexuality manifested itself, medicine through scientific treatment could help to correct it. Soto and Pérez opposed the common procedure regarding male homosexuals in Mexico, who in their words were “persecuted, incarcerated and confined at the penal colony at Islas Marias.”¹⁰⁶ They saw these procedures as cruel but, more importantly, they did not produce the desired effect, which was to eradicate homosexuality. Science, Soto and Pérez believed, by studying how homosexuality developed, could help to prevent it or to cure it. In their view, homosexuality was an illness for which the patient was not guilty.¹⁰⁷ Physician Zuloaga suggested that homosexuality and narcissism were so common that they should not be called “perversions,” nevertheless he saw them as “antisocial” manifestation of the sexual instinct.¹⁰⁸ The only procedure mentioned to “cure” homosexuality was the “Voronoff operation” (testicular transplantations from ape to man)

¹⁰³ González-Enríquez, ‘Orientaciones Y Programa Para La Educación Sexual’, 507. González-Enríquez also “pioneered the ‘conjugal visit’ –which allowed prisoners sexual access to their ‘spouses’ –specifically to alleviate the problem of homosexuality in the all-male world of the prison. Rob Buffington, ‘Los Jotos: Contested Visions of Homosexuality in Modern Mexico’, in *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, ed. Daniel Balderson and Donna Guy (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 124.

¹⁰⁴ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 125–45.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 143. Italics are mine.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 115–6. Their position opposed the criminological understanding of homosexuality that equated it to criminality and thought of it as threaten to the political, economic and social development of the nation. Buffington, ‘Los Jotos: Contested Visions of Homosexuality in Modern Mexico’, 118.

¹⁰⁸ Zuloaga, ‘¿Qué Es Educación Sexual?’, 3.

which Soto and Pérez reported had achieved the “normalization of the libido” in some cases.¹⁰⁹

6.5.3. Reproduction and heterosexual male and female sexuality

Physicians also determined a “normal” type of heterosexual sexuality. For Pérez and Soto the ethics of sexuality consisted in reproduction.¹¹⁰ In their view, men’s libido was active while the feminine libido was less intense and less differentiated, and, in this sense, similar to an infantile libido. They pointed out that masculine and feminine hormones were present in both sexes but that this did not make a difference because, “we all know that in love issues the man is always the *active* factor and the woman the *passive* one,”¹¹¹ which exemplifies how contemporary evaluations of gender attitudes impregnated scientific studies of sexuality.¹¹² The clitoris, Soto and Pérez considered, was rudiment of lower sensitivity if compared with the penis. They observed in most women that orgasm was slow or absent, showing the influence of Marañón’s work, but this was not a reason to worry because it did

¹⁰⁹ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 117. The Voronoff operation was practiced in Spain in 1926 with Marañón and surgeon León Cardenal as leading figures. It was also a method for rejuvenation for men (old men who wanted to increase their energy would do this surgery on themselves). Marañón indicated this procedure on three of his homosexual patients. These were his reported results: one effeminate man (eunocoid) patient changed his libido from men to woman (the follow up was six months). A second effeminate man patient without libido started to have an active libido towards men. A third effeminate man patient without libido manifested a “normal” libido directed to women after the operation (two months follow up). Glick observed that this surgeries are prove that during the 1920s Marañón believed that homosexuality was a kind of deficiency disease that could be cured by increasing the supply of hormones. In later years Marañón changed his views. Glick, ‘Marañón, Intersexuality and the Biological Construction of Gender in 1920s Spain’, 132–5.

¹¹⁰ They referred here to Auguste Forel to back their argument. Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 69.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 87. Italics are mine.

¹¹² Emily Martin’s study of the narratives that explain the process of fecundation in biology books is impregnated by gender constructions which emphasize elements associated to masculinity like activity and aggressively to sperm and elements associated to femininity such as passivity to the egg, contributing to reinforce these gender constructions and gendering our understandings of science. Martin, ‘The Egg and the Sperm’.

not affected reproduction. In fact, the feminine orgasm was “not essential, even useless.”¹¹³ In a normal woman, Soto and Pérez argued, orgasm consisted “in the illusion she has to be a mother; in the moment she hugs her baby for the first time; and in the infinite joy that to be a mother produces for her.”¹¹⁴ Regardless of this glorious equivalent of feminine orgasm that Soto and Pérez placed in maternity, it was concluded that “the orgasm and the libido only reached their maximum and perfection in men, remaining in a state of backwardness in women.”¹¹⁵ Even in married couples frequent sexual activity was considered negative, and Soto and Pérez believed that the introduction of contraceptive practices was erasing the moral efficacy of marriage. They advised couples to have coitus one to three times a week according to the husband’s virility,¹¹⁶ and not to practice coitus interruptus because it put too much pressure on the husband to hold back the orgasm, producing incomplete sexual satisfaction, which could be the cause of sexual neurasthenia and impotence.¹¹⁷ It is hard not to notice the different criteria used for men’s and women’s sexuality. While Soto and Pérez were so concerned by the incomplete sexual satisfaction that coitus interruptus could produce in men, they did not show any worry that the lack of sexual satisfaction in women could lead to physical or psychological problems. Because in Soto and Pérez’s view the ideal of sexuality was reproduction, women’s sexual satisfaction remained invisible. These discourses

¹¹³ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 90.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 89–90. Soto and Pérez argued that due to this lack of development in the feminine libido, women were not responsible when they were narcissist, or victims when they were seduced or fell on prostitution. *Ibid.*, 88.

¹¹⁶ Frequent sexual activities in married couples was considered to be an underlying factor for adultery. Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 68.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 68–9.

constructed men as sexual and women as reproductive beings, or in Soto and Pérez words, “In men eroticism rules, while in women rules their maternal aspiration.”¹¹⁸

Anthropologist Manuel Gamio¹¹⁹ shared Soto’s and Pérez’s conviction that woman’s most important social function was motherhood, but he also expressed concern about women’s sexuality. Gamio spoke about the effects of celibacy on white people, which in his view was the consequence of the economic barriers imposed on marriage in the middle and upper classes. For men, the impossibility of marriage was bearable because they could have sexual satisfaction through visiting a prostitute, but in women this produced “a hell of desperation and hysteria” while they should be “happy creatures, fecund sources of new beings.” He contrasted this situation with the life of indigenous women. For Gamio the white “race” should follow the example of the indigenous one, because indigenous people did not put up artificial obstacles to marriage, and all indigenous women “[could] enjoy the supreme gift of love and [could] aspire to the supreme glory of maternity.”¹²⁰ Gamio’s discourse was unusual in various ways. It put the indigenous “race” as an example for the white “race,” when the opposite was the most common approach, and he talked about women’s right to have sexual satisfaction. Even if he framed his ideas within the constraints of marriage and opposed contraception, it added women’s right to sexual satisfaction as an issue of debate.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 87.

¹¹⁹ Manuel Gamio (1883-1960) was a very important figure in the Mexican intellectual and political life. Gamio studied under the supervision of Franz Boas in Columbia University in 1910, he latter occupied various political positions in public administration. He is nowadays considered as the “father” of anthropology in Mexico and was a key figure in the layout of policies directed to indigenous groups in post-revolutionary Mexico, known as indigenismo. Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*, 78–100.

¹²⁰ Manuel Gamio, ‘El Problema de La Educación Sexual En Nuestro Medio’, *El Nacional*, 5 June 1933, 5.

¹²¹ Gamio warned against the possibility that sex education would disseminate ideas on family planning in a context in which he argued the augmentation of the population was much needed. Ibid., 1. Even without sex education at this time there was some diffusion of contraceptive methods, for example *El Nacional*

6.6. Women advocates of sex education

Some professional women were active defenders of sex education. Teachers Carlota Fernández and María Becerra González participated in this debate. Fernández gave a talk about sex education in the Puebla's Normal School and advocated a gradual teaching of reproduction starting from plants and animals and later moving on to humans.¹²² Becerra argued in favour of sex education starting in elementary school for children of both sexes and considered it a right of new generations. She defended the high moral of teachers and their capacity to provide sex education, contrary to the opinions of the UNPF. Becerra denounced that opposition to sex education came from bourgeois parents that did not understand this education's importance for the lower classes. Becerra agreed with the dominant opinion that sex education should be gendered, in the sense of aiming to prevent venereal diseases in young men and to reinforce chastity in young women who, armed with knowledge, would not be easily seduced. Becerra explored how the lack of sex education led to some young women being infected with STDs that, due to shame, did not receive the adequate treatment. Other girls had to suffer abortions or committed infanticide after being seduced.¹²³

In the context of the strike led by the UNPF, some women in Mexico City protested their disagreement with this procedure and a positive approach to sex education. They

published and an advertisement that said "Natality Control Solved!" that announced an indicator of the *only* days in which a woman can become pregnant, for the price of 2 pesos. It had the image of a stork with three babies hanging from a cloth in her legs and asking: should I leave it? 'Control de Natalidad Resuelto!', *El Nacional*, 5 March 1933, sec. Second, 6.

¹²² Labra, 'Los Padres Poblanos Contra La Educación Sexual', 5.

¹²³ María Becerra González, 'El Problema de La Educación Sexual I', *Imagen*, 30 June 1933. In Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*, 35–7.

included Herminia Morelos de Soriano,¹²⁴ president of the parents association in school zone 15, Soledad Martínez de Ibarra and Natividad Esquivel de Tapia,¹²⁵ members of the Society of Mothers of School 14-2, and Georgina Briseño de Pellicer,¹²⁶ president of the parents' association in the Benito Juárez school. Briseño actually challenged the newspaper *Excélsior* to have a public debate on sex education and believed that the parents who opposed sex education would change their minds about it after listening to expert physicians and teachers.¹²⁷

Two women physicians identified themselves as in favour of sex education.¹²⁸ One was socialist and feminist Matilde Rodríguez Cabo, the first woman psychiatrist in Mexico and a defender of children's and women's rights.¹²⁹ The other was Celia A. Reyes del Campillo, who played an active role in the promotion of sex education and took pride in being a pioneer in the discussion about it. In her views she agreed with the SEP that sex education had to be an integral part of life and promoted the integration of sex education in all levels of the school system.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ 'Las Agrupaciones de Padres de Familia Y La Educación Sexual', *El Nacional*, 25 February 1934, 2.

¹²⁵ 'Una Labor de Orientacion', *El Nacional*, 16 February 1934, 8.

¹²⁶ 'Se Consideró La E. Sexual', *El Nacional*, 15 February 1934, 2.

¹²⁷ 'Una Labor de Orientacion', 8.

¹²⁸ From the sources I reviewed.

¹²⁹ As mentioned in section 6.1 Rodríguez Cabo signed an opinion by the The Society for the Study on Neurology and Psychiatry. I could not find documents written by her in which she referred to sex education. Her professional life was very busy and she mainly concentrated in the treatment of "abnormal children" in the General Mental Hospital of la Castañeda. She actively fought for women's right to vote as part of the FUPDM and defended the depenalization of abortion at the end of the 1930s. 'La Opinión de Los Psiquiatras Sobre Educación Sexual'. Sosenski and Sosenski, 'En Defensa de Los Niños Y Las Mujeres'.

¹³⁰ In Chapter 4, section 4.2, I presented Del Campillo participation in the sex education campaign of the early 1930s. See her suggested program in Annex 1. Del Campillo also expressed support for the ideas of Serge Voronoff about rejuvenation. In Del Campillo's view those who practice sexual hygiene had longer lives. 'Es de Suma Importancia La Discusión Entablada Sobre Educación Sexual', *El Nacional*, 6 June 1933, 1–2.

Socialist and feminist journalist Leoneor Llach¹³¹ also expressed her views in favour of sex education and is the one who imprinted the debate with a feminist perspective. Llach refused to talk in terms of morality and proposed instead the term ethics that in her view was free from religious influence. She believed that innocence was not a beautiful thing and that those parents who were especially concerned about their daughters' innocence should provide them, and also their sons, with the knowledge of their responsibility as reproducers of future humanity, that she described as their "highest mission." For Llach, sex education was a middle way between the religious view that presented sexuality as a curse or a sentence and the teenager peers' teachings that presented it as simple delight. In this view she agreed with physicians and eugenicists who called for a conscious parenthood. She also agreed with the view that boarding schools propitiated the occurrence of "sexual deviations."¹³² Her feminist approach consisted of an attack on the value of modesty imposed on women. In the name of modesty, Llach argued, women had been limited by the options of books they could read and the liberties of the body and the soul that could help them to become more conscious beings. She opposed those who had nostalgia for a past in which women had no knowledge at all and called it decadent to try to perpetuate ignorance.¹³³ She also showed sensibility for the problems of poor girls who were forced into prostitution by their own relatives. She declared that the Revolution was made for these poor girls, and for this reason the state had

¹³¹ Leonor Llach born in 1905 in Barcelona, immigrated to Mexico in 1918 and year later acquired Mexican nationality. She studied law and was the secretary of the feminine section of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario or PNR, secretary of the Ateneo Mexicano de Mujeres and vice-president of the Mexican section of the International Women's League. She worked as journalist in publications like *El Nacional*, *El Universal Gráfico*, *El Universal Ilustrado*, *Crisol* y *Horizontes*. She wrote two fiction books, *Cuadros conocidos* y *Retratos de Almas* and one essay book called *Motivos*. Aurora M. Ocampo, ed., 'Llach, Leonor', in *Diccionario de Escritores Mexicanos*, vol. 4 (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1997), 486.

¹³² Llach, 'La Etica de La Educación Sexual', 3.

¹³³ Leonor Llach, '¿Qué Es El Pudor?', *El Nacional*, 19 August 1934; Leonor Llach, 'Literatura Para Mujeres', *El Nacional*, 4 September 1933, sec. Editorial.

the obligation to protect them through sex education, despite the opposition from middle- and upper-class parents.¹³⁴

In June 1933, a male journalist from Yucatan also criticized the double sexual standard. In an article published in *Diario del Sureste*, Mónico Neck denounced that some fathers were moralistic inside the home but lascivious outside, that they did not provide their children with sex education but that if they had “a fall in sexual matters” they were too prone to condemn them, especially women, who were in many cases kicked out of the family house if they were found pregnant out of marriage.¹³⁵

Feminist women did not challenge the idea that motherhood was the highest ideal for women, but they used the high value of motherhood to demand a wider participation in the public sphere. For example, in the conclusion of the first Congress of the Mexican Branch of the Pan American League for the Elevation of Women in 1923, women demanded that all the services of social welfare be put exclusively in the hands of women as the military service was exclusively for men.¹³⁶ And Margarita Robles de Mendoza in 1933 demanded women’s right to vote, arguing that women needed “a legal voice to defend their children.”¹³⁷

6.7. Conclusion

This sex education project promoted by the state and physicians, teachers and journalists including some women, was part of the state intention to extend services of health and

¹³⁴ Llach also supported socialist education.

¹³⁵ Mónico Neck, ‘La Educación Sexual’, *Diario Del Sureste*, 6 June 1933. In Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*, 20–22.

¹³⁶ ‘Conclusiones Del Primer Congreso Feminista de La Liga Panamericana de Mujeres’, in *Resoluciones Tomadas En El Primer Congreso Feminista*, Mexico (Talleres Linotipográficos ‘El Modelo’, 1923). In Julia Tuñón, ed., *Voces a Las Mujeres. Antología Del Pensamiento Feminista Mexicano, 1873-1953* (México: Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, 2011), 249.

¹³⁷ ‘Editoriales Breves. Las Mujeres Y La Política’, *Excélsior*, 1 March 1933, 5.

education to the majority of the population, which can be seen as part of a biopolitical project that intended to improve the lives of Mexicans. This sex education project was progressive in the sense that it wanted to disseminate the benefits of scientific knowledge regarding reproduction with the intention to improve the quality of life of the majority of Mexicans, but it reinforced traditional values that maintained the patriarchal organization of society, thus maintaining the situation of men's privileges and women's subordination. The project of improving the quantity and quality of the population needed the cooperation of men and women in different ways. For men it reinforced a model of healthy (free from STDs) masculinity in which men were constructed as workers and breadwinners and women as educated mothers. On the one hand, young men were constructed as sexual beings who needed to have some sexual activity, very likely through prostitution, to prevent the "deviation" of the sexual instinct, while a woman's virginity was constructed as a requisite to enter marriage, and as the container of her future husband's honour. By asking on the one hand that middle class girls remained virgins while boys went to prostitutes, these male physicians constructed two archetypes of women, the pure-aseexual woman, that should become a mother after marriage, and the prostitute-sexual woman who should satisfy men's sexual needs outside marriage. These authors did nothing to shatter the double moral standard, which had been a demand of Mexican feminists during the first decades of the twentieth century.¹³⁸ Very interestingly, to reinforce women's chastity, they did not mention scientific reasons of sexual development but religious values that backed ideas of women's purity and the complementarity of the sexes, that they invested with the authority of science.

¹³⁸ See Chapter 3, section 3.3.

Thus the new morality based on reason, away from the morality promoted by the Catholic Church was only advocated for men.

Women who enter this debate used the discourses on the importance of sex education and on responsible parenthood of eugenics, to promote a more egalitarian agenda. Llach advocated for the right that women had to knowledge in all areas of life and criticized modesty and innocence as positive values for women. Also women like Llach and Becerra wanted to break with the classist double moral standard of male physicians by providing examples of how the lack of sex education affected women from the lower classes and how they believed it was a responsibility of the state to care about the wellbeing of working-class women.

Theories of sexual development that informed sex education constructed sexual differentiation as an ideal, which helped to reinforce ideals of femininity and masculinity in terms of sexuality and physical and intellectual capabilities. These theories are examples of gender norms that tried to contain what it meant to be a man and a woman and actively constructed gender difference. Because these theories were influenced by evolutionist ideas they continued to see women as incomplete/less developed men. Sexual differentiation was believed to be a prerequisite of progress, but the place of “perfection” in terms of physical development, libido and sexual pleasure was supposed to be attainable only for men.

Furthermore, because the ideal of sexuality was reproduction, monogamous heterosexuality was constructed as the “supreme perfection of human sexuality.” The ideal of reproduction made invisible the sexual pleasure of heterosexual women, which was substituted by the joys of motherhood. It also allowed sexual tolerance for men, for whom a

tolerance to have sexual activities with prostitutes was justified due to their supposed “nature”. Homosexual men threatened at the same time the ideal of reproduction and the ideal of sexual differentiation. They were constructed as having an interrupted development of the libido that needed to be corrected, and as manifesting the wrong kind of functional primary and secondary sexual characteristics. Even if men’s homosexuality was pathologized, doctors advocated for a better treatment for homosexuals, who during that period in Mexico were criminalized. If the mother was the “the perfect type of feminine sexuality,”¹³⁹ it is not strange that female homosexuality was understood as the lack of maternal instinct with either an incomplete or masculine development of the libido. Soto and Pérez argued that a woman who is a mother or has maternal instinct can never become homosexual. This shows that as long as women fulfilled their role as mothers, their sexuality was not so under scrutiny. A kind of mandatory motherhood was socially fixed in which a woman that was not a mother could be accused of being an improper woman as well as be accused of homosexuality. As Nerea Aresti has studied for the case of early twentieth century Spain, the new glorification of motherhood, that she calls the “renewed duty to be a mother,” was intended to motivate women to perform traditional roles that were perceived to be under attack due to new educational and work opportunities for women.¹⁴⁰ In Mexico, to promote motherhood was the most important element in the ideal behaviour of women. It covered several functions: it was their social duty to provide healthy hard-working men to the nation, it was the ideal of feminine sexuality and it prevented the appearance of homosexuality.

¹³⁹ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 131.

¹⁴⁰ Aresti, *Médicos, Donjuanes Y Mujeres Modernas*, 163–80.

The few women who entered the debate were solidifying their place in male dominated environments. I view their participation in the debate as having a transgressive character, as it was not expected in the highly conservative environment of Mexico in the 1930s to have women expressing their opinions about sexuality. And some of them had a leading role, such as Del Campillo. They agreed in many aspects with their male contemporaries but, for example, Becerra and Llach included a more progressive agenda for women, as mentioned above. None of them talked about women's pleasure or women's sexuality outside marriage. It is possible that if they had done so, they would not have been considered legitimate voices in the debate. They did not challenge the mandatory motherhood that was imposed on women, but used the positive aspects associated with it to demand a higher participation of women in the public sphere.

Chapter 7.

Gender and sexuality in the discourses of opponents of sex education

In this chapter I will analyse how gender and sexuality were constructed by the ideas held by opponents of sex education. Given the fact that the opposition was successful in getting rid of the initiative, I consider exploring the meanings that they gave to gender and sexuality of great importance. I will analyse articles and editorials from the conservative newspaper *Excelsior*; some editorials that were published by the SEP in 1934, with articles published in different newspapers from 1933;¹ and leaflets and letters, related to the National Parent's Union or UNPF and National Association for the Freedom of Teaching, or ANPLE preserved in AHUNAM;² and some letters sent by parents to president Rodriguez to ask for the removal of the initiative found in the National General Archive or AGN. This chapter is divided in five sections. First, I explore the strategy of opponents. Second, I study how they opposed religious knowledge to scientific knowledge to defend their position. Third, I analyse how opponents conceptualized sexuality. Fourth, I analyse the gendered content of the protest. Fifth, I focus on how women that supported sex education were portrayed in the conservative press.

7.1. Strategy of opponents: strength, rumours and fear

The opposition to school-based sex education was not monolithic, but they agreed on the point that the responsibility of sex education belonged solely with parents. At the beginning

¹ This booklet contained seven editorials against sex education originally published in the newspapers the conservative newspapers *El Universal*, *La Prensa* and *La Palabra*. This last one was self-identified as a Catholic Publication. Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*.

² More specifically in the Documentary Collection "Fondo Histórico Palomar y Vizcarra", or FHPYV, that contains documents related to the catholic opposition in Mexico in the post-revolutionary years.

of the debate, before and soon after the publication of the CTC report, there were some voices at *Excélsior* that tried to convince parents to give some instruction on sexual matters to their children, based on the importance of the “normal” development of their sexual instinct.³ But later this moderate position disappeared and some of its authors added their voices to the most radical opposition,⁴ which was the view that dominated the debate. Using Foucault as a frame, as explained in chapter 6, section 6.1, I will study the oppositional arguments as belonging to the same strategy, and explore what meanings of gender and sexuality they articulated during the debates of sex education. I will also explore their understanding of reality, highlighting the types of knowledge and power relations the opposition defended and sustained.⁵

I explain the strategy of the opposition, especially of the UNPF, the ANPLE and *Excélsior* was two-sided. First, they tried to demonstrate to the government that the parents that opposed school-based sex education were a majority.⁶ Second, they tried to gain the support of parents by stirring fear. To do so, they changed the terms of the discourse from the scientific, health-oriented vocabulary of advocates, creating their own in which sex education was described as a dangerous threat,⁷ an affront,⁸ a crime, an obscenity and a

³ An important figure in this moderate posture was journalist Gonzalo Báez-Camargo, who wrote under the pseudonym Pedro Gringoire. Examples of this position are: Jorge Labra, ‘La Preparación de Los Padres’, *Excélsior*, 3 May 1933, sec. Editorial, 5; ‘Un Problema a Discusión. Carta Del Doctor Alfonso R. Ochoa a Pedro Gringoire.’, *Excélsior*, Un Problema a Discusión., sec. Editorial, 5; Pedro Gringoire, ‘El Pulso de Los Tiempos. Resoluciones Sobre La Educación Sexual. Padres Y Maestros. ¿La Escuela Frente Al Hogar?’, 2 June 1933, sec. Editorial, 5; Gringoire, ‘El Pulso de Los Tiempos. El Instinto Y La Niñez’, 5.

⁴ For example, Jorge Labra.

⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction*, 100–2.

⁶ They did so through demonstrations, letters and newspaper articles in which they spoke in the name of the majority of parents, for example lawyer Toribio Esquivel Obregón declared that in Mexico there was no one parent who would defend the project of sex education in primary schools. Toribio Esquivel Obregón, ‘La Educación Sexual’, *El Universal*, 13 June 1933. In Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*, 55.

⁷ ‘Otra Vez La Amenaza de La Educación Sexual’, *Excélsior*, 25 May 1933, sec. Editorial, 5.

⁸ ‘El Parto De... Las Parteras’, *Excélsior*, 12 June 1933, 5.

synonym of sexualism,⁹ prostitution, pornography and perversion that would corrupt children, stealing their innocence from them.¹⁰ They also spread rumours about immoral teachers who were already teaching sex education. For example, the ANPLE claimed that a woman teacher in a coeducational school in Mexico City took her group of students to the bathroom and forced the most beautiful girls to stand nude in front of the group to explain the functions of the human body and to show boys all the beauties of feminine nakedness. The ANPLE also reported worse horrors were happening in the state of Veracruz, but they declared that they were unable to repeat them in order not to promote perversion. All the tales always involved girls being exhibited or touched by teachers or doctors.¹¹ A woman journalist from the United States who lived in Mexico at the time, Verna Carleton Millan, said she was horrified by the “actual filth which was invented during this time.”¹² In a context of great illiteracy (in 1930 only 33 percent of Mexicans older than six were able to write and read)¹³ and strong religiosity, these rumours and descriptions of sex education produced horror in many parents. The ANPLE also supported the obligation parents had in the face of God to look after the souls of their children, which would be corrupted by sex education.¹⁴ As the UNPF did with teachers, whom they threatened with social and economic isolation,

⁹ Although the authors did not explain the meaning of the word sexualism, I think it was used to refer a social theory for the organization of society, like socialism and capitalism, but that instead of putting workers or the capital in the first place it emphasised sexuality. The word in Spanish was sexualismo and the advocates of sex education were called sexualistas. ‘Más Escuelas Donde Se Enseña El Sexualismo’, *Excélsior*, 12 February 1934, 1.

¹⁰ ‘El Crimen de La Educación Sexual’, *Excélsior*, 31 May 1933, sec. Editorial, 5.

¹¹ ‘Criminal Labor de Maestros de Escuela’, *Excélsior*, 10 February 1934, 9.

¹² Millan, *Mexico Reborn*, 55.

¹³ Vaughan, Mary Kay, ‘Women School Teachers in the Mexican Revolution: The Story of Reyna’s Braids’, *Journal of Women’s History* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 148.

¹⁴ And threatened with the excommunication to those parents who sent their children to socialist schools. This info comes from a leaflet signed by the AMPLE. With pen it has written 1932, but I think the paper correspond to 1934. It combines fears of sex education and socialist education. AHUNAM, FHPYV, microfilm, roll 67, dossier 306, box 43, page 3961.

opponents of sex education used all possible tools to threaten parents as well. The response, described by Millan, “amounted to veritable hysteria.”¹⁵

7.2. Whole truth versus scientific truth

Opponents of sex education were against the idea that reproduction would be taught as a biological process instead of from divine origin. Due to the dangers that they associated with sex education, they suggested the solution was to stop talking about sex education altogether.¹⁶ One author even defended the beauty of certain white lies and ignorance that were helpful to face certain difficulties in life. He declared: “Do not take away from our children and youth this divine blindfold that chastity and modesty maintain in its place,” and continued, “let these youth bodies walk blindly on the way of life, but carrying with them their young spirits.”¹⁷ A religious understanding of sexuality, that saw sexuality as sinful, a source of evil and temptation, may be the explanation for this encouragement of silence.¹⁸ As editorialist Jesús Guisa wrote in *Excélsior* on 29 May 1933, if sexuality “persuades us to evil, it does not take us away from it that we know its physiological functioning and hygienic rules.”¹⁹ He also compared sex with drugs and alcohol that gave the individual pleasure but sent him/her to ruin.²⁰ Many authors showed mistrust about the benefits that science could

¹⁵ Millan, *Mexico Reborn*, 55.

¹⁶ Jesús Guisa y Azevedo, ‘Moral Y Educación Sexual’, *Excélsior*, 29 May 1933, sec. Editorial, 5.

¹⁷ J. Nuñez, ‘La Educación Sexual’, *La Prensa*, 25 June 1933. In Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*, 62. All quotes from sources originally in Spanish are my own translation unless otherwise specified.

¹⁸ Guisa y Azevedo, ‘Moral Y Educación Sexual’, 5; Ignacio Bravo Betancourt, ‘Es Adversa La Opinión de Los Padres a La Educación Sexual Impartida Por Los Profesores’, *Excélsior*, 30 May 1933, 7; Labra, ‘Los Padres Poblanos Contra La Educación Sexual’, 8.

¹⁹ Guisa y Azevedo, ‘Moral Y Educación Sexual’, 5.

²⁰ Jesús Guisa y Azevedo, ‘Los Primarios Y La Educación Sexual’, *Excelsior*, 5 June 1933, sec. Editorial, 5.

bring to their lives.²¹ For example, Guisa declared that science “is not necessarily beneficial nor does it direct us toward good.”²² He opposed “scientific truth” to “whole truth.” For Guisa the whole truth meant, following Saint Paul, the conviction that human bodies did not belong to the individual (but to God) and that they were made for a purpose and individuals had to limit themselves and the use of their bodies to that purpose. In Guisa’s view, whole truth liberated the individual while sex education would make him/her a slave.²³ References to religion to support the authority of their arguments were common. For example, Mrs. Josefina Santos declared that, as Jesus Christ had said, those who offend a child and who believe in God, would better not have been born.²⁴ Lawyer José Pastrana Salazar declared that a school without God was unable to contain the evils of sexuality, which only “the good and saint customs of Catholic Religion [were] able to teach.”²⁵

7.3. The corruptive power of sexuality

If sexuality was corruptive, then there was no way to teach sex education without causing damage. The very idea that sexuality would become a normal topic of conversation among students horrified lawyer Esquivel Obregón.²⁶ Children’s sexual instinct would be awakened and nothing would stop them from practising this new knowledge.²⁷ Editorialist J. Nuñez

²¹ For example, Mrs. Josefina Santos called it “highly immoral science”. Josefina Santos Coy de Gómez, ‘La Educación Sexual Destruye La Dignidad Humana’, *La Palabra*, 1 June 1933. In Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*, 55. See also: Nuñez, ‘La Educación Sexual’; Jesus Guisa y Azevedo, ‘Correspondencia de “Excélsior”. El Debate de La Educación Sexual’, *Excélsior*, 12 June 1933, sec. Editorial, 5; ‘La Corrupción de Menores’, *Excélsior*, 15 June 1933, sec. Editorial, 5.

²² Guisa y Azevedo, ‘Los Primarios Y La Educación Sexual’, 5.

²³ I think here the author refers that an individual will become a slave of his sexual needs. As mentioned above sex was compared with drugs and alcohol, which conducted the individual to negative outcomes. *Ibid.*

²⁴ She was making reference to Matthew the Apostle 18. 5 in the Bible. Santos Coy de Gómez, ‘La Educación Sexual Destruye La Dignidad Humana’.

²⁵ José Pastrana Salazar, ‘La Educación Sexual’, *La Palabra*, 4 July 1933.

²⁶ Esquivel Obregón, ‘La Educación Sexual’.

²⁷ ‘El Crimen de La Educación Sexual’.

argued that given the passionate temperament of Mexicans, youth “[would] devote all their intelligence to this knowledge [sex education] and [would] forget about the other subjects.”²⁸ This stimulation of the sexual instinct would have different consequences in boys and girls. According to Mrs. Santos, it would lead boys towards the “way of abnormality that conduces to madness.”²⁹ For girls, she wrote, their first reaction to the knowledge of sexual relations “will be of repugnance, due to their instinctive shyness, then of unhealthy curiosity and finally of shamelessness.”³⁰

If knowledge led to perversion, then ignorance was preferable. This was the reasoning behind the strike and it echoed in the beliefs of many parents.³¹ A mother of seven children declared that she preferred them to be ignorant than to make them “candidates to prisons or brothels.”³² The strongly felt opposition of parents is well exemplified by Mrs. Santos’ description:

When my little daughter Maria Teresa turns upon me her limpid eyes which reflect the whiteness of her soul, I feel the desire to adore her as one adores an angel... and render homage to her innocence... and when I think of the monstrosities that sexual education will create in children, I think about my 10-year-old daughter and I say to myself, It would cause me less pain to see her lying dead than to see her innocence brutally shattered.³³

²⁸ Nuñez, ‘La Educación Sexual’.

²⁹ Santos Coy de Gómez, ‘La Educación Sexual Destruye La Dignidad Humana’.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The strike was supported by UNPF and the ANPLE. Bravo Betancourt, ‘Opinión de La Unión de Padres de Familia’. In Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*, 59. Parents who wrote letters to the president also supported this idea. AGN/México Contemporáneo/Archivos Presidenciales/ Abelardo L. Rodríguez/folder 580/169-1, pages: 3808, 5904 and without page number signed by Magdalena Martin and Pablo Luna.

³² Luisa R. de Ruiz. Letter sent to the president. AGN/México Contemporáneo/Archivos Presidenciales/ Abelardo L. Rodríguez/folder 580/169-1, 3808.

³³ Santos Coy de Gómez, ‘La Educación Sexual Destruye La Dignidad Humana’. Translated by Millan, *Mexico Reborn*, 56.

Opponents of sex education were afraid of homosexuality, which they referred to as a perversion.³⁴ The fear of homosexuality was exploited as a tool to gain consent against sex education. For example, the ANPLE suggested that because the SEP project only taught boys and girls about the anatomy and physiology of their own sex, it would lead to homosexuality.³⁵ There were also some expressions that showed that the lack of sexual differentiation was perceived in negative terms and as a source of perversion. An anonymous father, who sent a letter to the president, accused Bassols of being a hermaphrodite, and argued that, for this reason, Bassols was only thinking about immoralities.³⁶ This father also argued that sex education would contaminate Mexico with the evils of Sodom and Gomorrah.³⁷ Venereal diseases were mentioned as “secret illness,” but the authors believed their dangers were exaggerated by proponents of sex education.³⁸ This was part of the reluctance of the Catholic opposition to talk about sexuality and also a strategy to avoid scrutiny in the sexual prerogatives that men had outside marriage.

7.4. Feminine virtue, masculine honour

Opponents of sex education believed in a world of rigid separate spheres for men and women, in which women were primarily wives and mothers.³⁹ But they feared these functions were

³⁴ J. A. Sabara, ‘La Cuestión Sexual’, *La Palabra*, 30 July 1933.

³⁵ For the program see Annex 1. I think the SEP was trying to avoid bad reactions, for this reason and to make the program appear more innocuous SEP took the decision not to mention so explicitly the anatomy and physiology of the other sex. I think this is an example how malicious intentions were attributed to sex education anyway. José Meza Gutiérrez, ‘Una Protesta Contra La Educación Sexual En Nuestras Escuelas’, *Excelsior*, 13 January 1934, 9.

³⁶ AGN/México Contemporáneo/Archivos Presidenciales/ Abelardo L. Rodríguez/folder 580/169-1, without page number.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ ‘¿Debe Improvisarse La Educación Sexual?’, *La Prensa*, 30 May 1933. In Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Algunos Datos Y Opiniones Sobre Educación Sexual En México*, 53–4. Ironically advertisements for “secret illness remedies were placed just next to articles that condemned sex education. See for example: ‘Se Llegara Hasta La Huelga Escolar Para Defender a Los Niños’, *Excelsior*, 12 June 1933, 7.

³⁹ Alfonso Francisco Ramírez, ‘El Retorno Al Hogar’, *Excelsior*, 13 June 1933, sec. Editorial, 5.

threatened by the modern way of life. Lawyer Francisco Ramírez observed that contemporary women did not value domestic work sufficiently and were devoting their energies to jobs in the public and private sector, sending many male heads of household to unemployment, producing economic and moral instability.⁴⁰ While Ramírez agreed that women should have some education, so that they would be able to sustain themselves if necessary, he also advocated for a kind of education that would teach them how to fulfil their responsibilities at home, considering that the majority of educated girls at the time were completely incompetent.⁴¹ He added, that it was important to keep young women away from the stridencies of feminism, which was composed of “sour spinsters.”⁴² Fears about the changing role of women in society were common.⁴³ Professor Isidro Becerril said, “The emancipated woman, free, without prejudices, who is conquering everyday what she calls the equality of the sexes, is a woman without femininity or a butch. The man, among other things, becomes more feminine. Femininity and masculinity are lacking.”⁴⁴ And he suggested that education should preserve and polish the distinct characteristics of each sex.⁴⁵

Some editorialists in *Excelsior* expressed very conservative views about women, often couched in a flattering language. For example an editorial that appeared on 1 March 1933 declared that men and woman were not equal because women were superior to men. Nevertheless, he opposed women’s right to vote and equality before the law, because these privileges for men were in fact a protection for being society’s most inferior and weaker part.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Some authors viewed in a negative way the changing role of women in society, for example Jesús Guisa, compared women’s work with promiscuity, he declared: “The world now is promiscuous. Women work like men, have a continuous treat with them, do what men do”. Guisa y Azevedo, ‘Moral Y Educación Sexual’, 5.

⁴⁴ Guisa y Azevedo, ‘Correspondencia de “Excelsior”’. El Debate de La Educación Sexual’, 7.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Furthermore, this editorialist argued men's privileges were threatened by women who enslaved men, like in the United States "where men wash the dishes" and in "Russia," "where Mrs. Kollontay [sic.] and other ladies like her occupy high positions in the Soviet government."⁴⁶

To make motherhood more attractive to women its promotion should not be limited to schools, all society had to participate in rendering homage to mothers. Since 1922 *Excélsior's* founder Rafael Alducin promoted the celebration of Mother's Day on May 10. According to Marta Acevedo, Alducin borrowed the idea for the celebration from the United States, but his motivation was to counteract the consequences of the radical policies in the state of Yucatan, like the publication of Margaret Sanger's *Family Planning*.⁴⁷ If contraception entailed the possibility of women deciding not to be mothers, Aducin argued a whole campaign needed to be launched to glorify the mission of motherhood. For Mother's Day Alducin had the support of the Education Minister Vasconcelos and a big number of commercial industries that offered presents for mothers. Acevedo argues that an asexual model of motherhood was promoted.⁴⁸ This is well exemplified in the celebrations of 1933 where mothers were called "saint women."⁴⁹ By 1933 this celebration was widespread with festivals in every school and massive events, like the *Excélsior* annual festival in the National Stadium that featured the first lady, Mrs. Aida S. de Rodríguez, as a guest of honour.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ 'Editoriales Breves. Las Mujeres Y La Política', 5.

⁴⁷ See chapter 4, section 4.2 for a wider explanation of Sabger's publication in Mexico.

⁴⁸ Marta Acevedo, '10 de Mayo...', in *Feminismo En México. Revisión Histórico-Critica Del Siglo Que Termina*, ed. Griselda Gutiérrez Castañeda (PUEG UNAM, 2002), 39–51.

⁴⁹ It is also very interesting that in this promotion of motherhood they only used pictures of White women with European features. 'El País Entero Glorificara a Las Madres', *Excélsior*, 10 May 1933, sec. Second.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Women who opposed sex education invoked the high values of sacrifice and morality attached to mothers to demand the withdrawal of the initiative and their right to educate their children.⁵¹ They referred to the President Rodríguez as a father himself and called for him to protect children.⁵² Some women also called for the intervention of Mrs. Rodríguez, for example Mrs. Santos wrote:

I turn to you –mothers of Mexico –and, first of all, to the wife of the first ruler of the Nation... You, Señora, whom the public voice has acclaimed a model of mothers... will you watch without indignation, your little sons being initiated into the mysteries and vulgarities of sex?⁵³

This way of asking for the withdrawal of the initiative by the intervention of president Rodríguez's wife resembles the power attributed to Virgin Mary to intercede for causes with God in Catholic faith.

Modesty (*pudor*), which in Spanish carries the idea of being very reserved, especially in issues regarding sexuality, was thought of as the most important quality in women, which the strength of the family and the nation depended upon.⁵⁴ In Ramírez's words, "If [a woman] is an iris of virtue, society will benefit with her delicate fragrances; but if she is an orchid of perversity, her emanations will poison the world."⁵⁵ For this reason women should be carefully looked after and only the appropriate knowledge, which did not compete with the highest mission of motherhood, was viewed as good for them.⁵⁶ Thus sex education for girls

⁵¹ All women who wrote to the president made mention of their role as mothers. AGN/México Contemporáneo/Archivos Presidenciales/ Abelardo L. Rodríguez/folder 580/169-1.

⁵² This letter was signed by three couples from Tehuacán, Puebla. The names of the first couple are: Aurelio Márquez and María de Jesús de Marquez. AGN/México Contemporáneo/Archivos Presidenciales/ Abelardo L. Rodríguez/folder 580/169-1, page 007903.

⁵³ Santos Coy de Gómez, 'La Educación Sexual Destruye La Dignidad Humana'. Translated by Millan, *Mexico Reborn*, 56.

⁵⁴ Esquivel Obregón, 'La Educación Sexual'; Nuñez, 'La Educación Sexual'.

⁵⁵ Alfonso Francisco Ramírez, '¡Madre!', *Excélsior*, 10 May 1933, sec. Editorial, 5.

⁵⁶ Ramírez, 'El Retorno Al Hogar', 5.

was particularly offensive. A document by the ANPLE compared sex education for girls with the loss of virginity.⁵⁷ The ANPLE was offended by the comparison of the girl with a flower in the SEP's project,⁵⁸ and declared, "The girl is not a flower. The girl is a rational human being that has a soul and a moral conscience to educate, she has the duty to preserve her purity to become a good wife and a mother of a respectable family and not a loose woman."⁵⁹ To remind the public about the importance of virginity and the dangers of sexual knowledge, an editorialist recounted the story of the Vestals, priestesses of Vesta the goddess in ancient Rome, who took vows of chastity. If Vestals broke chastity vows they were penalized with the capital punishment, many times buried alive. From this story he concluded that even with the punishment being so ominous, Vestals sometimes fell simply from learning how sexuality worked.⁶⁰ For that reason it was important to keep women away from the corruptive power of sexuality that sex education entailed. For example an editorialist was scandalized by the possibility that women of 21 years of age, who were called "girls," would receive sex education as suggested by the FAPF.⁶¹ In the same attitude the editorialist that commented on SEP's project of sex education suggested that women should not read it, because it was like obscene books and pornographic representations, and should only be for men.⁶² Opponents of sex education viewed sexuality as something masculine. The ANPLE for example reasoned that sex education would be given as a prize for boys.⁶³ It is also interesting

⁵⁷ Meza Gutiérrez, 'Una Protesta Contra La Educación Sexual En Nuestras Escuelas', 9.

⁵⁸ See Annex 1

⁵⁹ Meza Gutiérrez, 'Una Protesta Contra La Educación Sexual En Nuestras Escuelas', 9.

⁶⁰ Sabara, 'La Cuestión Sexual'.

⁶¹ 'Más Contra La Educación Sexual', *Excélsior*, 27 July 1933, 5. Also the strike committees were strictly separated by sex.

⁶² '¿Lo Sabe El Señor Bassols?', *Excélsior*, 9 January 1933, sec. Editorial, 5.

⁶³ Meza Gutiérrez, 'Una Protesta Contra La Educación Sexual En Nuestras Escuelas', 9. If boys were going to be able to see naked women, and this was considered as a masculine pleasure, for them sex education for boys was a kind of reward.

to notice that *Excélsior* promoted a double standard; it professed to be scandalized by the idea that women would read the program of sex education but published advertisements of nude shows for men with very attractive images and names (See image 2).



Image 2. This show was called: “The delightful women”. It said “If you are in favour of nudism, we recommend to you the artistic nude of “The delightful women,” which is a nude that would make you daydream. *Excélsior*, 27, January, 1934, page 6.

In the opponents view, the family was under attacked by an intention of the state to intervene in the life of individuals, which they attributed to communist and socialist ideas. Lawyer Esquivel-Obregón complained about the lack of democracy in Mexico.⁶⁴ If democracy existed it would put an end to the intention of the state to deform children’s minds

⁶⁴ Esquivel Obregón, ‘La Educación Sexual’.

with sex education.⁶⁵ Esquivel-Obregón reasoned that communists of all times viewed the family as a consequence of private property and for this reason were against it. He argued: “Let Soviet Russia... try to prostitute its people by finishing women’s modesty off...but we have the obligation to preserve the strength of modesty in our houses, which is our dignity.”⁶⁶ Esquivel-Obregón called on men to defend their houses and to cultivate [women’s] modesty. And lawyer Ernesto Lecomte dramatized the situation by saying that sex education would be the same as offering the virgins of the school to a new god Huitzilopochtli,⁶⁷ and called men to action to protect their daughters and sisters from drinking “the rotten waters of sex education.”⁶⁸ These examples show that by contaminating women it was masculine honour that was offended. For this reason men had to defend their families and honour.⁶⁹ According to one editorialist, in fighting against sex education there were not “reactionaries nor revolutionaries, but *men*, fathers and mothers, who intensely care[d] about the preservation of their children, as far as possible, clean from the stain that could lead them to vice and perversion.”⁷⁰ A cartoon published by *Exelsior* showed two children behind their father, who was angry and ready to fight in defence of his children, also showed the masculine nature of the fight against sex education (See image 3).

⁶⁵ Meza Gutiérrez, ‘Una Protesta Contra La Educación Sexual En Nuestras Escuelas’, 9.

⁶⁶ Esquivel Obregón, ‘La Educación Sexual’. Fears about the influence of communism and socialism were common. See for example: Bravo Betancourt, ‘Es Adversa La Opinión de Los Padres a La Educación Sexual Impartida Por Los Profesores’, 7. In a letter sent by Ladislao Pérez Andrew to UNPF president he accused that the idea of sex education came from the immoralities of Bolsheviks. AHUNAM, FHPYV, microfilm, roll 67, box 43, dossier 306, page 3994.

⁶⁷ Huitzilopochtli was the Aztec god of sun.

⁶⁸ ‘Se Llegara Hasta La Huelga Escolar Para Defender a Los Niños’, 7.

⁶⁹ An author called to fight against sex education like men. *La Palabra*, 4 June 1933, 1. In Del Castillo Troncoso, ‘La Polémica En Torno a La Educación Sexual’, 218.

⁷⁰ ‘La Cuestión Palpitante’, 15 January 1934, sec. Editorial, 5. Italics in the original.



Image 3. Children say: Father, the teacher is going to give us sex education classes. The father answers: Tell your teacher to come and talk with me!

7.5. Attacks against women who supported sex education

If real women's most important characteristic was modesty, then there was nothing more disgusting than women who advocated for sex education. Part of the *Excelsior* campaign to discredit sex education consisted in suggesting that it was a perverse idea of evil women, real and imaginary. For example they declared that the SEM was mostly constituted of women who were "sexual discontents," and that it was directed by two ladies, one Mexican who was divorced and one of Russian origin.⁷¹ These women who, in the view of *Excelsior* did not have honourable lives, had the objective to lead children, especially girls, to immorality.

⁷¹ Five of the 20 founding members of the SEM were women, but when the SEM grew the proportion of women did not. So, women were not the majority and it was directed by male physician Alfredo M. Saavedra. See Chapter 4, section 4.1., where I outline the story of eugenics in Mexico including the SEM foundation.

Similar arguments were used to discredit the PCEP commission to discuss sex education organized by the nurses and midwives. Additionally *Excélsior* declared that the PCEP had a very humble origin, lacking any prestige.⁷² In a letter in which Celia A. del Campillo, president of the permanent commission of the PCEP, responded to *Excélsior*, the editorialist took the opportunity to ridicule her, transcribing a part of her letter with some typing mistakes and saying that instead of promoting sex education she should go back to primary school to learn how to write.⁷³

7.6. Conclusion

The opposition's strategy was based on the authority of religion and in the rejection of scientific knowledge for the "preservation" of traditions, including certain gender roles. This strategy solidified what a man and a woman should be in contemporary society. Women were thought primarily as wives and mothers and for this reason their purity, virginity and modesty were conceptualized as of supreme importance. Men were perceived as protectors of their family, especially of "their" women's honour. Because sex education would contaminate women with knowledge about sexuality, it was understood as an affront for men. Within women's honour rested the possibility and responsibility of the reproduction of traditional patriarchal families, which were the foundation of the nation. This traditional family was attacked by the state's intention to intervene in the education of children, and by the socialist and communist ideas that, in their view, informed state policies.⁷⁴ By propagating rumours

⁷² 'El Parto De... Las Parteras', 5; 'El Tiro de Gracia a La Educación Sexual', *Excélsior*, 31 July 1933, sec. Editorial, 5.

⁷³ 'Correspondencia de Excélsior', 7.

⁷⁴ To determine if the Mexican state applied or not socialist policies in the 1930s is complicated, and their position towards communists was ambivalent as communists were sometimes persecuted by the state. What existed was a rhetoric that defended more social rights for the population, with some mentions of socialism. See for example: Meyer, 'La Institucionalización Del Nuevo Régimen'; Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo En México (1920-1950)*; Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*.

of atrocities that occurred in the official schools, they presented sexuality in a negative light. They also perpetuated fears about the changing role of women in society that could result in men losing their privileged position in both the private and public spheres. Because the movement against sex education was led by middle- and upper class men, the state rhetoric, that included mentions of socialism, increased fears of losing privileges as a class, as mentions of private property show. Sexuality was constructed as something masculine, only men could enjoy it. And any mention of sexual issues to women put their modesty in danger. Women should become asexual mothers under the authority of their husbands. In this sense women's bodies were being appropriated to defend a Catholic morality, which made women's purity the bedrock of the patriarchal family and of the nation. The double moral for men and women was clear; even the more progressive FAPF suggested that sex education should be given to boys older than fourteen and "girls" above twenty-one. And for *Excelsior* it was immoral for women to even read the program of sex education, although the same newspaper advertised nude shows for men. The problems of venereal diseases were minimized because opponents claimed sex education advocates exaggerated this issue, and because it made male sexual incidences outside marriage evident.

The opposition declared that sex education would produce exactly the same evils that advocates aimed to avoid. Opponents of sex education also showed disapproval for homosexuality, which they called perversion, and "intersexuality". Because the "order" of society depended on the performance of the "correct" gender roles, opponents encouraged education that promoted gender differentiation and supported a campaign that glorified motherhood. Women who opposed sex education used this high moral stand that was promoted by both conservative groups and the government to give authority to their petition.

And women who supported sex education were ridiculed and feared by the conservative press.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored how gender and sexuality were constructed by different actors in the debates about sex education in Mexico in early 1930s. In this conclusion I aim to summarize my analysis and answer my main research question: How were gender and sexuality constructed by different actors in the debates about sex education? I will also consider my secondary questions: Was the content of sex education the same for boys and girls, what were the agendas and interests of the people and groups involved, how were women's bodies being appropriated by different actors, and how did eugenic ideas of prevention of venereal diseases and responsible parenthood influence the proposal?

I identified two main groups, those who lobbied for the implementation of sex education and those who opposed it. Advocates of sex education were male government authorities and female and male physicians, teachers, students and journalists, who sided with the state in its projects and viewed sex education as a progressive policy. The opposition consisted of Catholic men and women and its most visible organizations were the National Parent's Union (UNPF) and National Association for the Freedom of Teaching (ANPLE). The opposition also had a powerful ally in the conservative newspaper *Excelsior*, which took an active position in their favour on the debates. Supporters and adversaries of sex education defended two distinct and opposing political projects. A project led by the post-revolutionary state aimed at improving the lives of its citizens supported certain changes and transformations, which can be conceptualized as a biopolitical project that intended to promote ideal behaviours as a way of promoting society's wellbeing. On the other hand, the Catholic opposition led by middle- and upper-class men defended the status quo and opposed some state policies that included the secularization of education.

In this conclusion, I also want to contrast the discourses about gender and sexuality that were present in the debates about sex education to show whether the two sides had different conceptualizations of gender and sexuality issues, or if despite belonging to two opposing strategies, as argued in chapter 6, they used similar discourses about gender and sexuality to advance different agendas. I will compare them on three aspects: the creation of gender difference, normative gender ideals and their conceptions about sexuality.

Regarding sexual differentiation, both sides believed that education should reinforce the distinct characteristics of each sex, therefore reinforcing gender roles that would help to maintain male privilege in a patriarchal society. However, they differed in the way they attempted achieve this goal. Opponents of sex education believed the education of girls should teach them their functions at home to deter them from entering into labour force and producing moral and economic instability, but this education should not include any content about reproduction. On the other hand, promoters of sex education, influenced by eugenic ideas of responsible parenthood, argued that sex education was an important vehicle for the reinforcement of ideal gendered behaviours that should emphasize the prevention of venereal diseases for men and a model of scientific motherhood for women.

To define these ideal gender behaviours, especially those of women, men from both groups invoked religious books and symbols, religious doctrines, or scientific theories to support their claims. Symbols and normative ideas contained in religions and scientific knowledge are an important element in the construction of gender according to Scott.¹ While religious symbols were expected from the Catholic opposition, it is remarkable that physicians in favour of sex education alluded to religious books and symbols –like the Bible

¹ Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', 1053–75.

and the Virgin Marry – and not scientific theories in order to preserve the status quo of the subordination of women, reinforcing these religious values with the authority of science. Advocates of sex education also used scientific theories to define the “normal” biological, mental and psychic characteristics of men and women, and providing a scientific norm to contain the meaning of what a man and a woman should be, thus contributing to the construction of the male/female dichotomy as argued by Fausto-Sterling.²

Male proponents and adversaries of sex education supported a double moral standard for men and women that reflects gendered ideals of sexuality. Male physicians like Soto, Pérez, and González-Enríquez argued that women should stay virgins before marriage, which was constructed as a precondition of men’s honour, while men were not expected to remain virgins before marriage. Men were constructed as sexual beings, and due to the fears of homosexuality, physicians considered it was preferable for a young man to visit a prostitute than to risk the “deviation” of the sexual instinct. For girls sex education was supposed to serve as a shield to remain chaste before marriage. For boys it emphasized delaying the start of sexual activities for as long as possible as well as taught prophylaxis of venereal diseases. This double moral standard was accompanied by a classist division of women that upheld male privilege in society. Middle-class women were expected to keep their virginity to enter marriage while some lower-class women were expected to offer men sexual satisfaction outside of marriage through prostitution. This standard was also supported by male opponents of sex education because it emphasized the importance of women’s modesty (pudor) and purity to prevent young women, the bedrock of the family and the nation, from

² Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*.

losing their virginity while for men it was acceptable to view pornographic books and attend nude shows.

Women advocates of sex education, like Becerra and Llach, combated this classist double moral standard sustained by their male counterparts, and argued that sex education should help prevent poor girls from being vulnerable to prostitution. They also criticized the idea that “innocence” and “modesty” were considered defining characters for women. They used the discourses about the importance of responsible parenthood and sex education to advance a more progressive agenda for women, including more work and educational opportunities. Contemporary Mexican women advocated a single sexual standard for both sexes and led campaigns against prostitution, as argued in Chapter 3, section 3.3.

Male proponents and adversaries of sex education also agreed that the main function of women in society was to be mothers. By defining women primarily as mothers they attempted to appropriate women’s bodies to contribute to the project of the state or the Catholic oriented organizations. However, they conceptualized motherhood in a slightly different way. For Catholics the most important quality of a mother was her purity and to raise decent and religious families. Supporters of sex education advocated for a new scientific motherhood that incorporated all the benefits of scientific knowledge, including knowledge on reproduction, hygiene, diet and illness prevention that women were expected to execute to prevent child mortality and to strengthen the “race.” This model of scientific motherhood, while relying on traditional gender roles, also aimed at the improvement of the living conditions of the majority of Mexicans through the expansion of the educational and health system.

Discourses about motherhood were varied and used by different actors for different purposes. For example women advocates of sex education did not challenge the view that the main function of women in society was motherhood, but instead used the positive values associated with motherhood to demand full political rights and a greater participation in social life for women, especially in welfare institutions. Women who opposed sex education also invoked the widespread appreciation of motherhood to demand that the initiative of sex education be cancelled, and, finally, succeeded on a very significant Mother's Day.

In their conceptions of sexuality, male advocates and opponents of sex education agreed in some aspects: that sexual pleasure was a male prerogative, that homosexuality was negative, and on a model of asexual motherhood. Nevertheless, advocates of sex education were a lot more explicit in their explanations of sexuality due to their conviction that the "normal" development of the sexual instinct was linked to society's wellbeing. The Catholic opposition supported a policy of silence regarding sexuality that left heterosexual male sexual prerogatives outside marriage intact. Regarding homosexuality, opponents of sex education rejected and feared homosexuality because it transgressed the ideal of the Catholic family. Physicians in favour of sex education constructed reproduction as the ideal of sexuality and for this reason they condemned practices like masturbation and regarded homosexuality as a "deviation" from the "normal" development of the sexual instinct. Many physicians considered that sex education should help to promote the "correct" development of the sexual instinct. In their view, homosexuality was an acquired condition that should be prevented through education. If male homosexuality manifested, physicians proposed to medicalize it in order to "cure" it. This perspective to medicalize male homosexuality opposed its criminalization, which was a common approach at this time in Mexico. Female

homosexuality, as argued by Soto and Pérez, was produced by a lack of maternal instinct. Therefore, they recommended that sex education should help to prevent homosexuality by instilling the maternal instinct in young women, emphasising the reproductive qualities of women rather than their sexuality.

Annex 1. Sex education programs

1. SEP fragment of the sex education program¹:

A sex education program project for sixth grade published by *Excélsior* on 09 January 1934.²

Boys:

1. Masculine sexual glands
2. Their function in growing
3. Their function in reproduction
4. The sperm and its tracks of conduction
5. The spermatozoon and the masculine sexual cells

Girls:

1. Femenine sexual glands
2. The ovule
3. The girl is a feminine flower. The ovary in her is similar to that of the flower. Like the flower girls' ovaries had external tracks
4. The girl, like the flower produces ovules. Mature ovules are excreted
5. Hygienic care during the excretions
6. General hygiene of sexual organs
7. Conjugation of sexual cells
8. Amphimixis fecundation (refers to the merging of the nuclei of the sperm and egg cells; sexual reproduction)
9. Development of the embryo and the foetus
10. Influence of life conditions and parent's health in the life and health of their children

¹ The project was elaborated by a commission integrated by teacher José Arturo Pichardo, president of the CEP, teacher César Ruíz, president of the CTC, teacher Luis Hidalgo Monroy Chief of the Departamento de Enseñanza Primaria y Normal (Department of Primary and Teacher Training Schools) and physician Alfonso Pruneda, Member of the CTC. They elaborated a project of sex education and submitted it to primary school council on 21 December 1933. Narciso Bassols, 'Nada Hay Aun Sobre La Educación Sexual', *El Nacional*, 10 January 1934, 1, 8.

² 'He Aquí El Programa Sobre Educación Sexual Que Será Impartido En Las Escuelas', *Excélsior*, 9 January 1934.

11. Care and cleaning of sexual organs as part of the general care and cleaning of the human body
12. Individual and social meaning of sexual life.

The forming of the family. The homeland (Patria) as the reunion of families. Health and well-being of the family as the base for the happiness and progress of the country.

Puericulture

1. Revision of last year concepts
2. Alcoholic drinks and their influence in breast milk and in baby's health
3. Mother hygienic care during breast feeding.
4. When should wet nurses be employed?
5. Superstitions about harms or damages that people external to the child can produce
6. Fundamental rights of the mother
7. Fundamental rights of the child

El Nacional also published the modification in the program of "Study of Nature" to adapt it to the new knowledge on sex education for first and second grade. I include here just a summary of issues included in the program.³

First grade:

- Detailed observation of plants and animals during the seasons of the year
- At the end a final lesson on personal cleanliness and cleanliness in general

Second grade:

- The sun and wind in the reproduction of plants
- The wind and the hygiene at home
- Plants' organs
- Focus on nutrition and the processes of digestion circulation and respiration
- Practical activity: to elaborate a bouquet of flowers for mothers

2. Program proposed by physician Celia A del Campillo in the First Congress of Nurses and Midwives or PCEP

³ 'Texto Del Proyecto Que Se Ha Propuesto Como Programa Para La Educación Sexual', *El Nacional*, 11 January 1934, 1, 7.

Celia A del Campillo suggested that they should lobby to the SEP for the implementation of sex education in all schools in a class called “Hygiene and sexual morals”.⁴ The program she proposed is explained in the following table:

Sex and age:	Content:
Boys and girls in kinder garden	-notions on the reproduction of plants and animals.
Boys and Girls from 7 to 11 years	-notions on the reproduction of plants and animals, -parasitology.
Young students from 12 to 16 years (sex is unspecified, she uses the plural masculine <i>jovenes</i>)	-notions on the reproduction of plants and animals, -embryology, -hygiene of the sexual organs, -prophylaxis of venereal diseases.
Young students from 17 to 21 (sex is unspecified, she uses the plural masculine <i>jovenes</i>)	embryology, - the function of the reproductive system, -marriage hygiene, -prophylaxis of venereal diseases.

3. Program suggested by physician Raúl González Enríquez for secondary schools

González Enríquez’s program consisted of 30 weekly lectures. The published program only included 19 topics, it is possible that some topics were to be developed in more than one lecture.

1. Sexual differentiation (from unicellular beings to the man)
2. Primary sexual characteristics. Anatomy and physiology in man and woman
3. Secondary sexual characteristics in animals and in man. Puberty and internal glands
4. Sexed reproduction. Relationships of sexuality and heredity. Sex pre-determinism. Copulation (Satisfaction and physiological need)
5. Evolution of sexuality in the species

⁴ “Implantación de cursos de higiene y de moral sexual en las escuelas”, *El Nacional*, el 10 de enero de 1933, 1.

6. Evolution of sexuality in the episodes of civilization
7. Evolution of sexuality in the individual. Theories of Freud, Jung, Adler, Ellis, etc.
8. (Not included in the original)
9. Difference between sexuality and coitus and sexuality and eroticism. The libido. Sexual complexes (inferiority, jealousy, sublimation, neurosis, etc.)
10. Love problems, the character of Don Juan. Influence of the internal glands in the erotic emotions and sentimental relationships
11. Permanent sexual relations. Marriage: social and biological significance. Contact or Free love (Or in better words, freedom of love, as suggested by Jiménez de Asúa). Companionate marriage. Cohabitation (Amancebamiento)
12. Birth Control. Eugenic issues: marriage certificate
13. Transitory relations: Prostitution, causes and effects. Who are the prostitutes? Regulation or suppression?
14. Sexual pathology: spermatorrhea, involuntary ejaculation, etc.
15. Gonorrhoea
16. Syphilis
17. Masturbation
18. Inversion
19. Sexual perversions and psychopathies. Profilaxies, etc.
20. Normal love

4. SEM Program

SEM advocated for school-based individual sex education. Something quite difficult to achieve.⁵ It should be based on the truth and was separated in three periods. It should start at home and continue in the school and parents and teachers needed to receive especial preparation.

1. Instruction. Planned for children with notions of natural sciences including the reproduction of plants and animals.
2. Sex education. For adolescents explaining human reproduction accompanied by moral notions

⁵ 'Que El Educando Pida Explicaciones Y No Que El Mentor Las Ofrezca', 1–2.

3. Anti-venereal education to young (men) when sexual practices began to avoid diseases and perversions.

5. Soto and Pérez's program of sex education

Program suggested in the book *La educación sexual en la escuela mexicana. Libro para los padres y los maestros* (Sex Education in Mexican Schools. Book for Parents and Teachers) published in 1933 by physician Juan L. Soto and teacher A. Pérez y Soto.⁶ In Soto and Pérez view sex education should start in fourth grade in primary schools and it should be guided by three core topics.

- I. Elemental notions about the transmission of life
- II. General notions related to contagious and heredity illness
- III. Notions related to the reciprocal relations between man and woman, with the aim of reproduction and the constitution of the family. Teach boys and girls their future obligations as fathers and mothers, respectively.

Program:

4th grade: *-Elemental notions of natural history: about the reproduction of vegetables and animals.* –All living being come from other beings; their parents transmit it life. In the same way he will transmit life to future generations to perpetuate the species. Physiology related to reproduction. General notions about reproduction and heredity. These notions should be linked to the functions of nutrition and relation.

5th grade. *-Contagious illness and prophylaxis. -parasitic and infectious illness.* –Syphilis is not only a venereal disease, it is a general infection and we have the obligation to talk about it as we talk about anthrax or tetanus. –Prevent children about the uses of personal objects. –Use the occasion to talk about syphilitic infection and its consequences (If we study alcoholism and its effects on heredity, should not we talk about syphilitic heredity, as we speak about alcoholic heredity? Let's take out from syphilis its ignominious character, so that it does not work as an obstacle for its prophylaxis and treatment).

6th grade. –GRILS. –Puericulture. General Notions. –Use the occasion of illness associated to nutrition to talk about the influence of the health of the parents [in the child]; demonstrate the hereditary effects of chronic alcoholism, and also mention in a simple way heredity-syphilis and its transmission. –Infections transmitted by wet-nurse. –Attention to the new-born eyes in relation to gonorrhoea infection.

Prophylaxis must be a consequence of sex education; it is not only a scientific education, but moral as well; teaching of the biological duties plus education of the will.

⁶ Soto and Pérez y Soto, *La Educación Sexual En La Escuela Mexicana*, 142–6.

6th grade. –BOYS. –Duties of man in relation to hygiene. –Physical morality. –Biological duties. –Moral hygiene: education of the will; character formation. –The sexual function. –Duties and responsibilities of parents. – Unhealthy (morbosa) heredity. –Eugenics.

Soto and Pérez also suggested the following program for boys in secondary schools.

Physiology notions on reproduction. –Rules of sexual hygiene. –Advantages of [sexual] abstinence. –Notions on venereal diseases. –Its consequences in the individual, the family the race and society. –Indispensable notions on prophylaxis, placing moral prophylaxis in the first place. –Eugenic notions for the formation of the healthy family. –Rules of intersexual moral and biological moral. –Moral unification of both sexes. –Duties of men towards women, the child and the race.

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Mexico City:

AGN Archivo General de la Nación

HNM Hemeroteca Nacional de México

AHUMAM Archivo Histórico de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Guadalajara:

BPEJ Biblioteca Pública del Estado de Jalisco

Online:

HNDM Hemeroteca Digital Nacional de México

El Informador <http://hemeroteca.informador.com.mx/>

Primary sources: newspapers and periodical publications in the 1930s

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