

# **Taking Part: A Study of Adolescent Sexual Health Promotion in Peru**

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# Abstract

This study introduces a theoretical and empirical exploration of the issue of participation within the field of adolescent sexual health promotion. It contributes to, and engages in, two kinds of debates: policy and practice discussions on how to involve adolescents in promoting their sexual health, and academic debates on the relevant theory that informs policy and practice.

The thesis critically reviews literature on participatory adolescent sexual health promotion arguing that the field is located at the intersection of three central conceptual vectors: adolescence, which is constructed as inevitably transiting towards adulthood from the moment childhood ends; adolescent sexual health, which is primarily dictated by the languages of biomedicine and psychology; and adolescent participation, which appears understood as a process of adult transmission of knowledge onto the participating adolescent. Challenging these coordinates, and by drawing on the works of Jürgen Habermas and Paulo Freire, a framework for understanding participatory processes is elaborated. Participation here is conceptualised as a social process of creation via which those taking part in it concurrently shape and maintain knowledge, mould and stabilise social relations, and care for themselves.

A participatory adolescent sexual health promotion initiative implemented in rural and urban-marginal communities of the Andean, Coastal and Jungle regions of Peru, acts as the observational field for the empirical investigation of the conceptualisation of participation advanced in the thesis. Documentaries and dramas produced in video format by the adolescents taking part in the initiative, together with audio-visual recordings of group discussions in which the adolescents presented and problematised these videos constitute the qualitative data gathered in this study. The data was analysed to explore adolescents' collective elaborations of sexuality in general and of sexual health in particular, and to reconstruct, from these instances of collective creation, the workings of the participation processes that underpin them.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

How could you get to a situation where you have 12-year-old girls becoming pregnant by 14-year-old fathers. That's not in their interests or in the interests of the child. We should be asking: why? That is not the right age to have a child. You've got to make youngsters aware of the undesirability of having sex at the age of 12. ... Parents have got to take responsibility for their children. 12-year-old kids should not be on the streets at night. We need to find a new national moral purpose for this new generation.<sup>1</sup>

'Perhaps there is a failure at a schooling level – maybe we need a greater emphasis on the pains of teenage conception,' says Tudor. 'Girls and boys need to be able to access educational material much more readily – youngsters have to know how difficult parenthood can be.' ... 'We hear about AIDS and things all the time,' said Christopher Hart, 14. 'We see it all on TV and in the films. My older brother sometimes thinks I know too much. I just think I've grown up faster than he had to.'<sup>2</sup>

These girls are not mad and they're not bad. In their silly, dangerous way, they seek only to provide for themselves the rudimentaries that have so far been denied them. The question for the rest of us is this: if 12-year-old motherhood is the choice they are making, what are the options they are rejecting?<sup>3</sup>

The three passages above appeared on the same day in the same newspaper. News regarding the pregnancy of two 12 year-old girls in Sheffield, triggered once again a flurry of mass media attention on the issue of adolescent sex. On that occasion the factual reporting ceded its place to the points of view, recommendations, analyses and horrors of various figures directly and indirectly related to the matter. The first remarks are from the British Prime

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Blair, Britain's Prime Minister, interviewed by Andrew Rawnsley in *The Guardian*, "My moral manifesto for the 21<sup>st</sup> century", 5 September 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Michelle Tudor, Service Manager at Community Health Sheffield, a school nursing team; and Christopher Hart, a 14-year-old adolescent, both quoted by Burhan Wazir in *The Guardian*, "Young, bored and pregnant", 5 September 1999.

minister<sup>4</sup>, the second from a social worker and an adolescent, the third from a journalist.

These remarks all express a concern with teenage sex. Whether understood as an immemorial moral crusade of unnerving fervour, articulated in terms of a sublimating punishment, expressed as inextricably quotidian, or examined as a social phenomenon, the sexual lives of young men and women capture extensive attention within current social debates. Indeed, adolescent sex and teenage pregnancy occupy a contemporary public space that is as ample as it is uneven. (For better or for worse adolescent sex certainly occupies plenty of private space.) The debate involves an array of divergent voices, and is characterised by rampant disagreement.

Contemporary discussions on teenage sex traverse the boundaries of the nation-states. Although the themes, the vigour, and the dynamics of the debates vary substantially from country to country, the issue of adolescent sex, like money markets or poverty, can well qualify as global phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> As such, it appears fragmented into countless local realities as much as expanded across countries as a unifying concern. Adolescent sex unfolds in endless ways; at times it craftily avoids existing taxonomies; at times, it lends itself to the pincers of orthodoxy; at times, it retreats to the radical fringes. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of the sexual life of adolescents does not seem to escape the merciless forces of globalisation.

As a global issue, adolescent sex is subjected to likewise global trends. Dundee in the Scottish Highlands and Huamanga in the Peruvian Andes

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<sup>3</sup> Carol Sarler's comment column in *The Guardian*, "Why girls of 12 have babies", 5 September 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Two weeks after Andrew Rawnsley's interview with Tony Blair, during which the PM spoke at length about careless sex and teenage pregnancy, he learnt from his wife Cherie Booth that she had got "accidentally pregnant" (comment made by Andrew Rawnsley in conversation with the BBC Radio 4 10:00pm news bulletin on 7.7.2000).

might not have many things in common. However, in both cities 6.89 per cent of adolescents get pregnant every year; in both cities adolescent pregnancies come primarily from deprived areas.<sup>6</sup> Further, both in Dundee and Huamanga, the general public, the mass media, health and education authorities and policy makers severely single out the level of teen pregnancy as unacceptably high and, hence, in urgent need of intervention. More importantly, in neither city do the adolescents appear to take legitimate part in debate concerning these matters, nor in the actions taken to allegedly improve their sexual health. Huamanga and Dundee are just two examples of a far-reaching pattern among the disadvantaged, of unmet needs, and -more importantly- of the absence of substantive participation. Public concern with adolescent sex and adolescent sexual health, combined with public disregard for adolescents' as key stakeholders, stand together in an uneasy union, affecting the excluded much more than the fortunate.

Attracted by this striking unease connecting the sexual lives of the adolescents with the blatant lack of genuine participation of teenagers in discussions or initiatives intended precisely to improve their sexual wellbeing, this study is set as a double effort. First it seeks to explore the issue of adolescent sexual health in an attempt to better understand their feelings, values and actions in the daily performance of their sexual lives. Second, by engaging in dialogue with theoretical debates on the subject of participation, it aims to articulate a framework for understanding participation processes; here the goal is to unearth and exploit the creational potential treasured within the concept of participation.

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<sup>5</sup> See for example the treatment given to it in the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994 (UN, 1995) and in subsequent follow ups (UN, 1999; UNFPA, 1999, 1998a).

<sup>6</sup> Information corresponding to Dundee was obtained from Burhan Wazir in *The Guardian*, "Young, bored and pregnant", 5 September 1999. Huamanga's data comes from INEI (1997a, 1997b).

These two objectives are by no means independent from each other. The investigation of the issue of adolescent sexual health will be carried out on the one hand, by critically examining contemporary literature on the notion of adolescence and on the portrayal of adolescent sexuality, as well as by assessing the issue of adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion. On the other hand I will analyse a body of empirical material gathered over two years of involvement in an adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion project carried out in deprived communities in Peru. In turn, the theoretical framework of the concept of participation will be advanced, first, by elaborating further existing conceptual work on this issue and, second, by examining these elaborations against empirical material gathered in the health promotion project mentioned above.

Participation, a concept that enjoys widespread popularity in contemporary democratic societies, occupies a central space in the thesis. The framework of participation that is advanced in the thesis is profoundly indebted to social psychology. In effect, I draw on classic social psychological concerns to articulate a theoretical perspective. In particular, I benefit from a long tradition in social psychology interested in unveiling the problematic nature of the individual-social divide. While it is clear that it is individual agents who participate –institutions or societies can only participate metaphorically– the phenomenon has to be approached from a perspective that does not reduce the issue of participation to the mere addition of individual behaviours. On the other hand, if institutional or societal participation are conceived as more than just a metaphor, then conceptual effort is needed to prevent the disappearance of the agent from the instance of participation. An integration of these two key precautions can be sought in the body of knowledge generated within social psychology. And it is precisely by moving within this knowledge that I aim to address the issue of participation. Moreover, by doing it with respect to the specific area of sexual health I take full advantage of the indisputably social nature of sexual acts.

This thesis is divided into eight chapters: this introduction, three conceptual chapters, three empirical ones, and a conclusion. Chapter two provides a review of relevant literature on the issue of participatory adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion. It takes up these issues in a progressive fashion. First, it looks at research on the notion of the adolescent. Second, it discusses literature on adolescent sexuality, in particular on adolescent reproductive and sexual health. Finally, it reviews the literature on adolescent sexual health promotion, concentrating on participatory models for adolescent reproductive and sexual health promotion. The review of the literature presented in chapter two engages in dialogue with contributions from researchers, and from policy makers and practitioners in the fields discussed.

Chapter three develops a conceptual framework for understanding participatory adolescent sexual health promotion, drawing on the works of Jürgen Habermas and Paulo Freire. In a nutshell, it first engages in dialogue with the work of Habermas in order to capitalise on the potential of the notion of communicative action for the understanding of participatory processes. Second, it revisits the work of Paulo Freire with the goal of recasting his notion of *conscientização* or the development of critical consciousness under the framework of communicative action. Finally, it derives, from the conceptual operation outlined above, a framework for understanding participatory adolescent reproductive and sexual health promotion.

Chapter four provides an account of the methodological arrangements developed in order to explore empirically the conceptual model put forward in chapter three. It explains the steps taken along the research process. It first concentrates on the issue of the design principle guiding this study. Second, it provides a justification and rationale guiding the step of data elicitation,



concentrating on the special methodological provisions with respect to audio-visual data, which is the type of social data utilised in this study. Finally, it explains the general steps taken in order to move from data elicitation to data analysis.

Chapters five, six and seven constitute the empirical section of the thesis. In them, the issue of participatory adolescent reproductive and sexual health promotion gets explored by analysis and interpretation of field data. Each chapter begins with a methodological note in which it provides the rationale for the specific analysis of the portion of data used in the chapter, e.g. development of coding schemes, the coding process, etc. Following the methodological note, each chapter provides the results of the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered in this study. Briefly, while chapter five focuses on adolescents' accounts on the communities they live in, chapters six and seven concentrate on specific issues related to adolescent sexuality. Finally, chapter eight brings together the conceptual and empirical parts of the study in order to provide a general discussion on the issue of participation in adolescent sexual health promotion.

At this point, I invite the reader to move on to the next chapter. I started this introduction by presenting a flavour of mass media reporting on the issues of teenage sex and adolescent mums. The Prime Minister himself stood up to voice his views on the matter. Whatever the stance taken on this issue, something remains unequivocal: the unintended consequences of sex reach deep; and as in innumerable other cases, baby Leo's father is experiencing them first hand.

## Chapter 2

# The Biosocial Gap

In this chapter I will review and discuss some central issues that characterise and feed the field of *participatory adolescent sexual health promotion*. First, I will enquire on the conception of adolescence, specifically on how the birth and moulding of the adolescent of today unfolded along the XX century, the key period of time witnessing and promoting this notion. I will argue that adolescence is an adult construction bearing a complex and burdensome signification load. Further, I will propose that the concept of adolescence appears embedded in multiple -and often incompatible- discourses, and is overridden by the language of biological determinism. In particular, I will suggest that adolescents are understood as inevitably transiting towards adulthood from the very moment they leave childhood. Along this process, an overshadowing concern with the end state adulthood constricts and governs the instances for expression and articulation by the adolescents of their own interests. Adolescents' transit to adulthood appears zealously patrolled and dictated by the concept of the adult.

Second, I will concentrate on one particular aspect of adolescence, that of adolescent sexuality. In this respect, I will review and discuss literature on the delicate relationship between the notions of adolescent sexuality, adolescent sexual health and adolescent reproductive health, attempting to articulate these issues in the light of contemporary discourses on adolescence. I will claim that adolescents' sexual and reproductive health, are indelibly marked by the adult hegemonic element at the root of the notion of adolescence, constituting a particularly strong example of adult surveillance of adolescence. Knowledge of adolescent sexual and reproductive health, I will propose, gushes into the notion of adolescence, in accordance with the

prescriptions laid down by the overarching discourse of transit into adulthood.

Third, against the backdrop of the discussions on the notions of adolescence and of adolescent sexual and reproductive health, I will critically explore the field of adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion, concentrating my attention on *participatory approaches* to promotion. Here I will review academic research as well as policy and practice literature on the matter. Participatory approaches to adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion, I will suggest, appear to be in a mutually reinforcing relationship with the adult hegemonic conceptualisations of adolescence, and of adolescent sexual and reproductive health. I will propose that, underpinning the theory and practice of participation by the adolescent in sexual and reproductive health promotion, there is a highly problematic understanding of adolescent participation. In a nutshell, I will argue that, despite the pervasiveness of a rhetoric associating participation to adolescents' articulation of their *own* concerns, *adolescent participation is still conceptualised as a process of adult transmission of knowledge on to the participating adolescent*. Implications of this conceptualisation will be discussed at the levels of theory and practice.

## **1. The troubled adolescents**

Adolescence, from the Latin *adolescencia*; from *adolescere*<sup>1</sup> to grow up, from *alescere* to grow, from *alere* to feed, to nourish. Growing up, in its intransitivity, in its promise of maturity, conflicts and mixes with the asymmetric transitivity of nourishing and feeding. These contrasts could not

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<sup>1</sup> The Latin word 'adolescente' is the present participle form of the verb 'adolescere'; the past participle of the verb is the word 'adultu(m)', which provides the root of the English noun 'adult'.

be more gracefully manifested than by contemporary Western discourses on today's adolescence and adolescents. From "parents of tomorrow"<sup>2</sup> and "future leaders of their nations"<sup>3</sup> to "no longer children and not yet adults"<sup>4</sup>, or bearing "necessary -but not sufficient- conditions for full maturation"<sup>5</sup>, a vast array of colourful characterisations denote boys and girls caught between childhood and adulthood.

The twentieth century, "the century of adolescence"<sup>6</sup>, attempts to bring together under a unifying category those who are neither children nor adults<sup>7</sup>. Although rooted in nineteenth century knowledge and practices, adolescence is distinctively a trait from the twentieth century<sup>8</sup>. Childhood and adulthood, on the other hand, are both older than adolescence. However problematic, contradictory or fragile these two categories may appear to be they enjoy a weight that is foreign to adolescence. This stabilising weight, this mass of in-built meaning, this multi-layered mantel of sedimented truths, endows the notions of childhood and adulthood with a semantic authority that leaves adolescence in a constant and inevitable state of movement. Crucially different from childhood and adulthood, adolescence is defined in terms of what it is not. Moreover, in the midst of this constitutive absence there appears a distinctive trait: mutation. Either as "the period of time during which the individual develops from child to adult",<sup>9</sup> "the period of transition from childhood to adulthood",<sup>10</sup> or the "period of turbulent transformation

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<sup>2</sup> Allan Guttmacher Institute, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Gibson-Cline, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Eisemberg, 1965.

<sup>5</sup> Eisemberg, 1965.

<sup>6</sup> Ariès, 1962: 30.

<sup>7</sup> Dasberg, 1983.

<sup>8</sup> Demos and Demos, 1969. Ariès (1962) notes that while the use of the word adolescence can be traced back to the Middle Ages the "adolescent of modern times" appeared only in the Nineteenth century to gain definitive space in the Twentieth century. US psychologist Granville Stanley Hall is usually acknowledged as the one who introduced the concept of adolescence as a body of knowledge (Hall, 1904). However, as Griffin points out "Hall's work reflects a particular combination of discourses around 'race', sexuality, gender, class, nation and age which were very much rooted in a specific historical moment" (1993:12).

<sup>9</sup> UNFPA, 1998a: 6.

<sup>10</sup> IPPF, 1994: 5.

from childhood to adulthood”,<sup>11</sup> adolescence always finds itself transiting. What lies outside its boundaries and its condition of perennial motion simultaneously draw the significance of the adolescent. US psychologist Dorothy Rogers, writing on the “nature and meaning of adolescence”, tells us that, above all, “adolescence is a process”<sup>12</sup>. Adolescence is made of movement and absence: absence of childhood, absence of adulthood. These absences however, cast their shadows on the moving adolescent, ceaselessly chasing and pestering the growing boys and girls, tirelessly plotting and carrying out masterminded signification assaults. This persecution instigates more and more motion; but, as the adolescent moves the shadows remain still, defeating basic laws, unleashing a disconcerting sense of unexplainable vertigo.

The transit character of the notion of adolescence sheds light on important aspects related to this peculiar contemporary category. An interesting side of the “moving nature” of adolescence is the veil of transitoriness that, depending on the occasion, shelters or condemns adolescents’ actions. Think, for example, about adolescent homosexuality. Unlike adult homosexuality, same sex relations during adolescence enjoy tricky glimpses of societal protection. Condemners of homosexuality place adolescent homosexuality at a different level of blame from adult homosexuality. Many consider them as part of a “normal” transition into adulthood. The transit character allows for the adolescent to explore. This apparently stage-specific search may take the young woman or man to incur into the world of homosexuality. All this is done however under the belief that these “practices are considered normal during sexual development and not indicative “per se” of posterior normal or abnormal behaviour.”<sup>13</sup> Adolescent excursions into homosexuality appear to enjoy a comfortable refuge. However, the conditions for this type of transitory asylum do not appear as enjoyable as the asylum itself. Adolescent

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<sup>11</sup> Giarratano-Russell, 1998: 1.

<sup>12</sup> Rogers, 1969: 6.

<sup>13</sup> Chù, 1993: 128.

homosexuality receives shelter because of the transit condition of the former and the transitory characteristic of the latter; but this veil does not allow for more than a momentarily lapse of homosexuality. As soon as the articulation of adolescent homosexuality demands societal arrangements that require for example, institutionalisation of mechanisms, review of practices or reformulation of procedures, in short, operations that turn the transitory into the permanent, sheltering becomes condemnation, neglect, or at best, inaction. Think about the recent UK debates on the age of consent for homosexual sex<sup>14</sup> or on the “promotion of homosexuality in schools” (the “scrapping of section 28” debate)<sup>15</sup>, or the lack of support provisions for adolescent homosexuals in health centres<sup>16</sup>, or the treatment of adolescent homosexuality in schools<sup>17</sup>.

Another interesting side of adolescence as a transit category is the degree of avidity shown by researchers in constructing and interpreting adolescents’ experiences in terms of empirical evidence that provides scientific validation to the inevitable transition from childhood to adulthood. There is a long history of careful literature, from the natural and the social sciences, engaged in measuring adolescents’ physical changes, psychological developments, socio-moral achievements, etc. Adolescence as a body of knowledge appears as primarily constituted of endlessly and microscopically described accounts of every imaginable instance in the exciting journey from childhood into adulthood. Little literature makes an effort to engage in debate with the adolescents<sup>18</sup>. Adolescents accounts appear, more often than not, instrumental

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<sup>14</sup> In an unprecedented parliamentary debate, the House of Lords rejected twice a bill approved by the House of Commons, in favour of lowering the age of consent for homosexual sex to 16, equating it with heterosexual sex. Despite the fact that the Commons passed the bill by a majority of 207 votes in 1998 and 183 in 1999, the Lords voted against it, entangling the legislation in extraordinary procedures, exercised in less than a handful of occasions in the last one hundred years. See for example The Guardian’s article *Rebel peers say no to lower age of gay consent*, (14.4.1999).

<sup>15</sup> For an enlightening debate on the “section 28” debate see Wise (2000).

<sup>16</sup> See for example, Allen *et al.* (1998) for illustrative cases of lack of support for the homosexual adolescent with respect to the health services.

<sup>17</sup> See for example, Nichols (1999) or Telljohann *et al.* (1995) for illustrative cases of lack of support for the homosexual adolescent at school.

<sup>18</sup> Studying the field of adolescent health and sexuality, Milburn claims that this issue is affected both by adult definitions of adolescence and by “the dearth of good data about

to particular classifications: more developed, irresponsible, less developed, upper and lower, stage four and a half, crisis phase, etc. Adolescence generates its own social physics. Bio-psycho-social studies tend to revolve around ideas of growth; disputes populate the natural-to-social horizon: Is it a biological disposition or is it a social circumstance? Is it ascribed to the person or is it not? But stretching across this universe, there is a categorical state of movement that seems to enjoy a truth condition that is beyond rational inquiry. It ceaselessly demands better and better understanding of what stage along the transit path to adulthood the adolescent is in. If extra attention is to be paid to the adolescents' own accounts and experiences it is likely that this will be geared towards the adult understanding of the reasons why the particular boy or girl has deviated from the movement-towards-adulthood path. Although this path has been carefully crafted as non-linear, multidirectional, culture specific, even allowing for transgressive experiences like a homosexual fling, it is bound to have adulthood as the end point. But, as we will see later, not any type of adulthood, but a particular one.

The flip-side of this movement-notion of adolescence is a deep signification of conceptual fragility, of instability that accompanies the transition from childhood to adulthood. Not any type of fragility, but one that it is precisely such because of the condition of movement in which is caught up. It is a fragility that does not belong to the concept of adolescent but to the movement. Adolescence ticktacks forfeited between the weakness of the child and the strength of the adult; it is neither private nor public or it is both; it is not dependent nor it is autonomous. Adolescence transits. It transits from childhood to adulthood, from girl to woman, from primitive to civilised, from instinct to environment, from nature to culture. Adolescence witnesses the

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young people's own views" (1996: 12). She identifies an array of problems related to the little dialogue between adults and adolescents, in particular "getting teenagers to talk at all", "assuming that adolescent health-related behaviours (particularly in the area of sex) result from conscious rational choice", "not understanding accurately the constraints surrounding adolescent sexual risk-taking", and lacking in-depth information about the meanings of relationships and 'romance' to teenagers" (ibid.: 12-13).

appearance of streams of stormy hormones and daunting identity dilemmas, of hated hair bushes and fancy fiancée fiascos, of marriageable masculine muscles and promising un/employment prospects.

Adolescence, conceived fundamentally as a transit category, runs into unavoidable trouble in arranging its boundaries. The literature tends either to opt for a chronological solution, naming adolescent all those who are between 10 and 19<sup>19</sup>, or to look into bio-psycho-sociological landmarks for a conceptualisation of the frontiers of the category<sup>20</sup>. On the entry side puberty in general and the onset of sexual maturity in particular enjoy an almost indisputable prestige<sup>21</sup>. On the other end, adolescent exit seems to be signposted by marriage and/or employment<sup>22</sup>. The problematic nature of entry and exit boundaries is a well-known issue<sup>23</sup>. A couple of illustrations may help. If we follow bio-psycho-sociological landmarks, as much of the research literature on adolescence does, we have to conclude for example, that an unemployed gay man might never leave adolescence; or a working eight years old girl will have exited adolescence without having ever entered it.

Entry and exit boundaries show nicely some aspects underpinning the conceptualisation of the adolescent. They fit neatly when the boys and girls follow a clear heterosexuality-followed-by-marriage-and-a-job pattern. However, as soon as this path is not observed, then the very notion of adolescence falls. As the examples above show issues such as sexual orientation or the dynamics of the labour market appear at odds with mainstream understanding of adolescence. Adolescence as it stands strictly

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<sup>19</sup> WHO, 1986a.

<sup>20</sup> UNFPA, 1998b; Ruzani *et al.*, 1995; Gonzales, 1994.

<sup>21</sup> For an analysis of the problematic adolescence entry boundary see, for example, Muuss (1968); for problems related to the delimitation of menarche see Ussher (1989); and for an analysis of socio-cultural aspects influencing the physiology of menarche see Laslett (1971).

<sup>22</sup> Griffin, 1993.

<sup>23</sup> WHO, 1986a. For a critique of adolescence exit boundaries see, for example, Springhall (1986).



applies to just a few boys and girls. The rest of the world's adolescents, indeed the majority of them do not appear to be such. Or better said, they qualify for a place in the category if they follow the chronological stream of thought.

The coexistence of chronological and bio-psycho-sociological notions of adolescence generates insurmountable tensions. Researchers favour engaging in lengthy debates on the cross-cultural, semantic or ethical validity of the boundaries of adolescence; the outcome appears to take the shape of a conceptual chaos. As Lea Dasberg eloquently puts it,

At one moment in time adolescents can consist of: boys and girls in schools or boys and girls working in a factory; boys and girls writing up poems in a diary, or fighting for a guerrilla group; boys and girls experiencing their initial rites of their tribe into manhood and womanhood, as well as boys and girls undergoing a lonely and guilt-ridden experience of masturbation. At the same time, even within the same culture and in the same social class, there are adolescents still wondering what cohabitation is like, while others have already experienced abortion.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, in the world of practitioners the chronological definition, from 10-to-19-years of age enjoys high currency<sup>25</sup>. Moreover, it offers interesting advantages. For example, a WHO report on young people's health, after acknowledging that adolescence varies "greatly from culture to culture", favoured the 10 to 19 age range conceptualisation arguing, among other things, that it "coincides with some population statistics and is useful for health planning".<sup>26</sup> As an addition, "it facilitates cross-national comparisons of data and experience."<sup>27</sup> These are certainly not the only benefits of the chronological definition. In addition to the incontestable standardising power of the numerical, this notion does not obstruct the researchers' debate. The chronological coexists with the psychological, the

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<sup>24</sup> Dasberg, 1983: 1.

<sup>25</sup> WHO, 1986a.

<sup>26</sup> WHO, 1986a: 11.

sociological and the biological; moreover, it provides a valuable vector that feeds into these disciplines in such a way that it becomes an easy target impossible to dismiss. Think about a biology or a psychology without the mathematics of age. Think the unthinkable.

Back to the bio-psycho-sociological understanding of adolescence. Moving beyond the realm of positive definitions, Christine Griffin attempted a post-structuralist inspired analysis of discourses around adolescence<sup>28</sup>. Looking mainly at UK and US literature she traced a complex web of discourses underpinning adolescent research and undoubtedly feeding the world of those practitioners involved with adolescents. Griffin plotted a cluster of heavily normalising discourses operating on the adolescent, aiming to guide, control, if necessary adjust, the lives of young men and women; a manifold set of practices, techniques and institutions in charge of ensuring that every child growing up will “mature into ‘normal’ adulthood”. Griffin characterises this cluster of mainstream discourses,

in terms of the search for the putative causes of specific constructed social problems, the tendency to use the victim-blaming thesis, and to represent certain groups or individual young people as ‘deviant’, ‘deficient’ or otherwise inadequate. Mainstream analyses also tend to psychologise inequalities, obscuring structural relations of domination behind a focus on individual ‘deficient’ working class young people and/or young people of colour, their families or cultural backgrounds.<sup>29</sup>

The transition into adulthood is the “natural” backbone of adolescence. Adults patrol the likewise natural unfolding of this trajectory, looking into those attempting to step out of it, in the pursuit of finding within the boundaries of the transgressor the natural reasons for the misdemeanour. Griffin concludes that, not surprisingly, the unruly adolescents go hand in

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<sup>27</sup> WHO, 1986a: 12.

<sup>28</sup> Griffin, 1993.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.: 199.

hand with the excluded of society<sup>30</sup>. This idea finds support in De Levita's view on adolescence as

a kind of steeple-chase, in which the child, with his drives and talents, has to jump over a number of obstacles, put in his way by society, or by his immediate environment as the representative of it, in order to adapt to society and, importantly, to what society is likely to have in store for him.<sup>31</sup>

Adolescence is a transition. A process. In the eyes of many, adolescence can take endless twists as long as sexual maturity, marriage and employment fall within it. The exit boundaries of the category look rather like belonging to adulthood. Marriage and a job are part of adulthood; adolescence has little to do with them.

Adolescence used to be that period created by the state as an extension of childhood so that some boys and girls were compelled to go to school, as required by the new industrial society<sup>32</sup>. The idea has long ago evaporated as the industrial society demands on the one hand that more and more adults get into education and training<sup>33</sup>, stripping adolescence from that exclusivity; or ironically and stubbornly extending adolescence further. On the other hand, the same industrial society, exercising its global strength, has been pushing millions of children into the labour market<sup>34</sup>, cynically skipping adolescence altogether. For others, adolescence is equated to the period of crystallisation of our identity<sup>35</sup>. A period of crises, recapitulations, balances and torments. Post-modernism however, has convincingly shown that it makes better sense to talk about identities rather than identity, and that far from being crystallised during adolescence, these fluid intersubjective

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<sup>30</sup> Griffin contrasts these mainstream discourses with the way radical literature constructs adolescence. She notes that while "Young people are not constructed as 'problems' in the radical literature" (ibid.: 191), there is still a "tension between the construction of young people as passive victims of oppression or as active social agents who are capable of resisting and transforming the conditions of that oppression" (ibid.: 195).

<sup>31</sup> De Levita, 1983: 20.

<sup>32</sup> Lapsley *et al.*, in Kroger, 1996.

<sup>33</sup> Giddens, 1998.

<sup>34</sup> Bequale and Myers, 1995.

achievements get moulded again and again in every turn of our lives. The adolescent years still host key kernels of the formation of identities, nevertheless they have long ago ceased to be the years of instability-before stability. This however, should be seen not in terms of a stability suddenly discovered in our teen years, but rather as a characterisation of the substantiality-in-the-making that pervades contemporary adult years, blurring more and more the limits between the two concepts: limits that were never clear.

As Modernity increasingly defies adults to face reflexively the burden of existential decisions falling on their shoulders<sup>36</sup>, adolescence acquires more and more relevance. A spouse and/or a job have long lost their “guarantee” status, acquiring a characteristically global “risk” one. Either seen as adolescent exit or as adult entry, the social institutions of marriage and employment find themselves as downgraded cornerstones. The transit character of adolescence, deprived from the certainty of a predetermined path, bounces into its origins to acknowledge that sexual maturity - particularly menarche- is the only remaining distinctive trait, at least the one that more eloquently absorbs the zealous gaze of the adult world. Without an essence, stripped of the few traits that history painstakingly crafted along a century of calamity, left only with the biological blessing of fertility, adolescence unfolds as a Barthean myth<sup>37</sup>. Emptied of form and filled of signification, adolescence finds itself as a social blind spot relegated and elevated into the menacing pedestal of the “danger zone”.

## **2. The troubled adolescents have sex (and get pregnant)**

Moving back from the exit side of adolescence into its entry door we find a trait that carves a fundamental mark into the category. It is not just like the

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<sup>35</sup>Kroger, 1996

<sup>36</sup> Giddens, 1990, 1991.

<sup>37</sup> Barthes, 1993.

transformation of boys and girls into adolescents or of adults into elders; adolescents enjoy the privilege of hosting the blossoming of sex. “One of adolescence’s most important events is puberty, which is characterised by sexual maturity, somatic growth, functional changes, the capacity for reproduction, the emergence of secondary sexual traits and sexual motivation.”<sup>38</sup> In a bolder and more convinced fashion, an UNFPA report on adolescent sexual health moves beyond the mere occurrence of sexual maturation during adolescence and inverts the terms of the equation, “Adolescence occurs when the individual’s sexual response and reproductive health systems mature”<sup>39</sup>. Sexual maturity, in its many shapes, seems to mark adolescence indelibly. Biology puts sex into adolescence or, rather it puts adolescence into sex. Biology creates adolescence. Adolescence rises from sexual maturity.

If we expand the argument initiated in the previous section, the sexual maturity aspect of adolescent provides a fertile ground for further depicting the contemporary notion of adolescence. Childhood abruptly finishes when the little girls and boys acquire the capacity for procreation and reproduction. However, although the capacity for reproduction is reached almost simultaneously by boys and girls, it is the menarche that arises as the distinctive marker. Introducing a special issue of the journal *Studies on Family Planning*<sup>40</sup> dedicated to “adolescent reproductive behaviour in the developing world”, John Bongaarts and Barney Cohen list and analyse contemporary “trends in key events during adolescence”<sup>41</sup>. They identify these key events in this order: menarche, schooling, entry into marital union and age at first intercourse, and first birth. Menarche is subsequently dissected, cross nationally, into a myriad of statistical partitions. No mention is made of adolescence as the time in which boys enter sexual maturity. A

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<sup>38</sup> Gonzales and Coyotupa, 1994: 37.

<sup>39</sup> UNFPA, 1998a: 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Studies in Family Planning* is the journal of the influential US based Non Governmental Organisation Population Council.

<sup>41</sup> Bongaarts and Cohen, 1998.

menstrual period is worth more than a live sperm. Reproduction hits girls with harsher virulence; as physical bearers of pregnancy they concentrate most of the attention of the adult. On the other hand, the early days of boys' adolescence seem to vanish behind a sort of researchers' and practitioners' amnesia, an amnesia that leaves its traits all along the teen years.

Reproduction, as fundamental landmark, triggers a plethora of guards operating on multiple levels and oriented to opening, compressing, extracting, controlling, pouring, closing, supervising, and moulding the lives of boys and girls. The newly acquired capacity to procreate triggers a set of non-linear inter-related processes that endlessly transform adolescent sexuality, constantly redefining its boundaries and contents. A first key operation can be briefly described as the process of constriction of the field of adolescent sexuality into reproductive health. At another level however, the very process of constriction turns over itself, enlarging reproductive health into sexual health. Finally adolescent sexuality in its reproductive and sexual health versions is further atomised into countless versions of sex education; one these versions however, attracts particular adult attention, public funds and private blessings: family life education. In this complex operation the adolescents are initially placed at the centre, then they are torn into pieces of biological, psychological and social meaning; finally, if the operation proves successful, they are recomposed, as sexually responsible individuals, into healthy adults. Above all, as sexual maturity takes place adolescence experiences a qualitative jump into what Foucault characterised as the "speechification" of sex, as "sex put into discourse",

Speaking about children's sex, inducing educators, physicians, administrators, and parents to speak of it, or speaking to them about it, causing children themselves to talk about it, and enclosing them in a web of discourses which sometimes addressed them, sometimes speak about them, or impose canonical bits of knowledge on them, or use them as a basis for constructing a science that is beyond their grasp –all this together enables us to link an intensification of the interventions of power to a multiplication of discourse. The sex of children

and adolescents has become, since the eighteenth century, an important area of contention around which innumerable institutional devices and discursive practices have been deployed.<sup>42</sup>

Every possible instance within the reach of adolescent sexuality appears poured into speech, and “treated”. An important operation in the discursive treatment of adolescent sexuality is that that constricts it into reproductive health. This many-fold process encompasses the microscopic mapping of the workings of the body and its diseases, and the careful recording of an array of related technologies. In the internet, in health centres, on CD-ROMs, in drop-in centres, on TV and at schools, the adolescent will carefully look at, patiently learn and tirelessly repeat the difficult names of difficult organs with difficult physiologies. While it is very unlikely that boys and girls will hear with insistence about their respiratory system or their digestive system (they will just learn to wear a sweater if its cold or to wash fruits before eating them), their sexual and reproductive systems will be explored to exhaustion, every name memorised, every function learnt and every movement accurately described. Everything perfectly recited. In this activity, the body will undergo a double process. First it will be turned inside out, the skin and flesh, reprehensible carriers of the erotic forms of sex, will vanish into an imperceptible background. And second, once every possible trait of the sexed human body has been transmuted into aseptic physiology or anatomy, it will be ready to be talked about, again and again, until tiredness. In this process, human bodies get alienated, they lose almost every contact with themselves in order to regain a different status: they cease being the bodies of boys and girls to become the male and female bodies<sup>43</sup>. These bodies, with their humanity torn off, and located well outside the everyday life of boys and girls, remain the bearers of a discourse feeding and individualising the adolescents. If perennial transit is an almost ontic character of adolescence, the male and female bodies -didactic tools carefully elaborated and

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<sup>42</sup> Foucault, 1978: 30.

<sup>43</sup> Berer, 1998.

powerfully transmitted to young boys and girls- are just as much a part of the journey to adulthood.

The process of constriction of adolescent sexuality into reproductive health delivers far more than a pedagogical body stripped of any trait of humanity. Accompanying this constellation of organs, there are associated diseases. Sexual and reproductive systems are systems at risk. Sex transmits ailments and adolescents have to learn about them. They have to know. For this purpose the inhuman body that serves for the didactics of sexual anatomy and physiology gets didactically infected time and time again. And time and time again the boys and girls will be requested to spell out every possible risk that can potentially cause torments.

A third element in this process of constriction is technology. Human technology for an inhuman body. An ever-growing menu of devices enters the discursive formulation of the reproductive health of the adolescent. Over and over again boys and girls will be requested to memorise and spell out multiple classifications, groups and subgroups of tools and strategies that will affect the working of the male and female body. To summarise, by the time the knowledge of bodies, dangers and technologies successfully join the transiting adolescents in their journey to adulthood they will be in a position to, amongst others, explicate “the working of the Cowper glands”, classify “venereal lymphogranulomas as infrequent”, and tell us that “the pill blocs the production of gonadotropic hormones, preventing ovarian follicles from maturing”<sup>44</sup>.

Adolescent reproductive health however, does not enjoy the privilege of being the exclusive body of knowledge about the adolescent body that adults firmly hand down to the boys and girls in their transit into adulthood. As the aseptic representation of the body that serves to map organs, functions,



diseases and technologies, runs short of explanatory power and proves unable to address aspects of sexuality that elude this process of constriction into reproduction, sexual health appears as a necessary expansion of reproductive health<sup>45</sup>. However important, reproduction is just one aspect of sex. Moreover, if health is about bio-psycho-social wellbeing<sup>46</sup>, knowledge of reproduction should be complemented with knowledge about human psychological and social aspects pertaining to the world of sexual wellbeing. Sexual health can fill this gap. However, this is not done in a disordered fashion. Instead it is secured by a meticulous division of labour in the scientific treatment of the sexual lives of boys and girls,

The notion of sexual health emphasises the signification of qualitative aspects of human beings such as development at a personal level and in relation to others, the value of affectibility and of communication. The notion of reproductive health makes reference specifically to procreation aspects in the couple's relationship.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> All three examples were extracted from a Peruvian sexual education handbook for adolescents (CEDER, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> The expansion of reproductive health into sexual health can be traced by looking at the transformation of institutional health promotion programmes along the eighties and nineties. Although the WHO technical definition of sexual health can be traced back to the mid seventies (OMS, 1975), the notion was primarily used with respect to adult sexual health. It is important to make a distinction between adults and adolescents in the development of the notions of sexual and reproductive health. A well-known book that impacted widely in the field is 1983 WHO's "Adolescent Reproductive Health - An Approach to Planning Service Research", in which the topic is treated as 'reproductive health'. Moving on the late eighties, we have a joint edition by WHO/UNFPA and UNICEF (1989), "The Reproductive Health of Adolescents - A Strategy for Action", that still talks about reproductive health of the adolescent. The words 'adolescent sexual health' made its appearance in the nineties in publications such as "Coming of Age: A Guide for Assessing the Situation of Adolescent Sexual and reproductive Health" (WHO, 1997a). However, sexual health shared the space with 'adolescent reproductive health'. In the UK for example, the Department for International Development expanded the words 'reproductive health' to 'sexual and reproductive health' in their funding schemes only in 1997.

<sup>46</sup> Health as a "state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity" is WHO definition of the word (see WHO 1948 Constitution Chart). This definition enjoys wide global currency.

<sup>47</sup> Cerruti Basso, 1995: 140. Focusing on the sexuality of Latin American adolescents, Cerruti Basso clearly points out that sexual health and reproductive health are often incorrectly used as "synonyms" (she prefers to label the relation as "complementary") and that adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion have "classically" approached the issue in terms of "reproduction" and "pathologies", neglecting "sexual themes". However, she endorses the incorporation of these neglected aspects into a 4-stage developmental model for the

The operation that secures the expansion of reproductive health into sexual health can be described in a nutshell as the movement from mechanics to sociality, from the cardinal two to the social couple, from the many as population to the many as society. However, bringing alive the reproductive male and female bodies proves to be a dangerous venture, a step into the dark, a door opened to human agency, in particular to adolescent agency. The language of sexual health differs from that of reproductive health; it changes from technical descriptions and classifications of organs, physiologies, diseases and technologies to principled evaluations regarding institutions, norms, feelings and practices. Adolescent sexual health seems to lack the microscopic thoroughness of scientific empiria that characterises reproductive health. Its battlefield is another one. In re-investing the biological body with agency, the objective world of reproductive health extends into the intersubjective and subjective worlds of sexual health. Sexual health becomes about human relations, about social interaction, about subjective expression. It ceases to be circumscribed by utterances such as “venereal lymphogranulomas are infrequent” to become a field in need of an approach reaching beyond the boundaries of instrumental knowledge; an approach in a position to gauge and problematise norms, regulative speech of the type of “You’ve no right to decide over my body”; an approach ready to incorporate the language of human expression, for instance, “I had great sex last night”.

The turn taken by sexual health has decisive implications in the field of adolescence sexuality. Moving out from the language of truth or falsity of assertions into the rightness or wrongness of norms and the truthfulness or insincerity of expressions generates an immediate shift away from the solid bedrock of scientific knowledge and into the unstable world of (inter)subjectivity. Controversial matters, which in the objective world of reproductive health get resolved under the transparent procedures of

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understanding of adolescent sexuality consisting of: “Isolation”, “Uncertain orientation to

scientific search for truth, in sexual health they find themselves entangled in the less transparent worlds of ethics and morality. As such, disputes no longer qualify for truth or falsity. It is not any more about disciplining the adolescents into reciting the correct way of unrolling a condom, but rather, it becomes about negotiating its use or not; it is not any more about knowing the organs involved in vaginal sexual intercourse, here it is about performing it or not, about enjoying it or not. In the process of expansion of reproductive health into sexual health, a fundamental move from science to morality slides in. The discursive precautions available through the application of scientific criteria step down to give way to a different patrolling infrastructure, one that is in a position to deal with the thorny dilemmas of morality and ethics. In allowing for a practical space that will enable this new discursive structure to be implemented, the conception -and more importantly the transmission- of sexual health has to undergo an ulterior metamorphosis. It will become sex education.

As sex education, the sexuality of boys and girls will take countless forms. One of these however, will occupy a position of privilege, at times it will even monopolise the universe of sex education. It is the form that offers insuperable credentials for a successful arrival of the transiting adolescent into proper adulthood: family life education. Asha Mohamud, contributing with a paper on adolescent fertility and adolescent reproductive health to a United Nations expert group meeting to form opinion on family planning, health and family well being notes that,

Sex education or family life education is part of virtually every programme working in the prevention of early pregnancies and the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STDs among adolescents. Whether it takes the form of informal group discussions, individual counselling or formal courses there are as many different kinds of sex education as there are philosophies and values related to sexuality.<sup>48</sup>

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sexuality", "Opening to heterosexuality", and "Consolidation".

<sup>48</sup> Mohamud, 1996: 159.

Mohamud sees family life education as a widespread phenomenon, one taking numerous shapes. These shapes in turn appear to welcome substantially different voices, and more specifically, different “values” and “philosophies”. This sense of unlimited plurality conveyed by Mohamud points to the countless ways of addressing the countless sides of adolescent sexuality. On the other hand, the family, or rather the family life acts as an all-encompassing common denominator. A common denominator in a position to include the many faces of sex education; all-encompassing because it transcends every value and every philosophy, family life appears as an ontic category beyond the consideration of any aspects of plurality. The transiting adolescent inevitably moves towards adulthood, adulthood inevitably hosts family life.

Sex education or family life education vertebrate the transit of the adolescent from the moment it becomes such to the moment it ceases to be so. Mohamud adheres to mainstream dictums and conceives adolescence as that period that goes from childhood to adulthood, sign-posted by menarche and marriage. Adolescence is not just a period like others but a particular one defined in terms of alarming absences. During adolescence, biology dangerously blooms well ahead of sociality creating what Mohamud colourfully names a “biosocial gap”. For the proper surveillance of this gap, but more importantly, for the appropriate filling of the gap, a plethora of techniques, precautions and mechanisms are set into motion. In particular these will patrol the adolescent’s reproductive health and above all their sexual health. They will ensure that all necessary knowledge gets elaborated and handed down to the growing boys and girls. Family life education and sexual health education are paradigmatic instances of this endeavour<sup>49</sup>. However, by no means these are the only ones. Batteries of such other ventures populate the lives of boys and

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<sup>49</sup> UNFPA, 1997a. In this thorough world wide evaluation of adolescent sexual and reproductive health projects, the equating of sex education with family life education appears to pervade not only, across countries, but also across the various actors involved in health promotion within the boundaries of each country, i.e. policy makers, health and education authorities, NGOs, etc.

girls between 10 and 19 years old. These will be undoubtedly oriented to promote their sexual and reproductive health, to fill the biosocial gap. As such, they will occupy our attention in the coming section.

### **3. Providing for the troubled adolescents**

Adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion has a short but prolific history. In almost every country the sexual and reproductive health of the adolescent has become a public issue of central concern for policy makers.<sup>50</sup> The debate on the promotion of the sexual and reproductive health of ten to nineteen year olds arouses heated controversies. Issues such as adolescent pregnancies or the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among young people have fiercely penetrated the public sphere, generating more polemic than consensus, dividing and uniting families and researchers as much as institutions, practitioners and policy makers. Promoting adolescent health, and specially adolescent sexual health, is presented as one of public health's most challenging ventures. This debate will occupy the centre of the discussion of this section. On top of the problematic natures of the notions of the adolescent, adolescent sexuality and adolescent sexual and reproductive health discussed in the previous sections, another polemic layer enters the equation, that of health promotion itself.

Briefly speaking, health promotion appeared abruptly during the eighties<sup>51</sup>, primarily as a paradigm stemming from the vilification of health education as "victim blaming"<sup>52</sup>. In its few years of existence, the area of health promotion has been shaped by contributions from a wide array of related and unrelated fields. This situation that has provided the discipline with as much resources as detractors. The eloquent multi-disciplinary profile of health promotion is illustrated nicely by Seedhouse,

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<sup>50</sup> UN, 1995.

<sup>51</sup> Rawson, 1992.

<sup>52</sup> Crawford, 1977.

A glance at the health promotion literature will show that health promoters use booklets (derived mainly from work in *medicine* and *education*) to educate patients in hospitals, surveys of people's beliefs about health, illness, well-being and quality of life (collected from *sociology*, *psychology* and *epidemiology*), miscellaneous morbidity and mortality figures (from *epidemiology* and *statistics*), behavioural change techniques (from *psychology*), legislative change (from *law* and *politics*), lobbying over the health effects of environmental pollutants (from *pressure groups politics*), lectures and group work in schools (from *education*), 'Look After Yourself' exercise and nutrition programmes (from *physical education*), advertising campaigns (from *psychology*, *politics* and *propaganda*), opportunistic fitness testing (from *medicine*), joint programmes with food manufacturers to offer approved products and educational materials in supermarkets (from *marketing*), life skills teaching (from *education* and *psychology*), health belief models, health action models, theories of reasoned action (all from *sociology* and *psychology*) and a great deal more besides.<sup>53</sup>

David Seedhouse skilfully conveys in one long sentence the kaleidoscopic image that appears when one attempts to peep through the lens of health promotion. His view is supported by other academics studying this field. Rawson, for example, argues that there are over 100 health promotion models<sup>54</sup>; he claims, in consonance with Seedhouse, that these have been criticised as being riddled with circularities, short-sighted claims to neutrality, oversimplifications, ungrounded assumptions as well as of being unstructured and un-integrated.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to the conceptual anarchy that informs health promotion practice, there is another aspect that deserves attention, the relationship between researchers and practitioners. Macdonald and Bunton argue that knowledge in the field has developed without a clear distinction between theory, research and practice. Moreover, practitioners outnumber researcher and

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<sup>53</sup> Seedhouse, 1997:27.

<sup>54</sup> Rawson, 1992.

<sup>55</sup> Rawson, 1992; Seedhouse, 1997.

academics, and neither group appears as a homogeneous one.<sup>56</sup> This apparently chaotic state in which health promotion finds itself should not be assessed in a practical vacuum. Instead it should be understood in relationship to the area in which health promotion exercises its greatest influence, that is, public policy<sup>57</sup>.

Health promotion, as a field driven by practitioners and shaped within the collective sphere of public policy, finds its way through the maze of language in a deliberate fuzzy fashion<sup>58</sup>. Indeed, if we look at key landmarks in the recent past of health promotion we will find that mainstream conceptualisations of the notion purposively evade the pincers of the substantive. For example the 1986 WHO Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion states that

Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health. To reach a state of complete physical mental and social wellbeing, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realise aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. Health is, therefore, seen as a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasising social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. Therefore, health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector, but goes beyond healthy lifestyles to wellbeing.<sup>59</sup>

Here health promotion, deliberately riddled with circularities, places its efforts in articulating an approach to the topic rather than the topic itself<sup>60</sup>. This open character of health promotion has remained relatively unchanged in the almost decade and a half that has elapsed from the 1986 Ottawa Conference. Indeed, the latest landmark on the topic, the 1997 “Jakarta Declaration on Health Promotion into the 21st Century”, broadly confirmed the approach outlined in Ottawa conceptualising health promotion as “a

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<sup>56</sup> Macdonald and Bunton, 1992.

<sup>57</sup> PAHO, 1996.

<sup>58</sup> Seedhouse, 1997.

<sup>59</sup> WHO, 1986b: 1

<sup>60</sup> Petersen and Lupton, 1996; Lupton, 1995.

process of enabling people to increase control over and to improve their health.”<sup>61</sup> These declarations carefully craft a procedural perspective to health promotion, leaving to the field of public policy, the task of shaping it substantively<sup>62</sup>. Let us have a look at the actual shapes that health promotion initiatives have taken with respect to our topic of interest, the sexual and reproductive health of the adolescents.

The field of adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion attained broad public space during the eighties, in particular after the launch of WHO “Adolescent Health and Development Programme” and UNFPA “Youth for Youth” initiative<sup>63</sup>. Since then, countless other projects got their way into the implementation field<sup>64</sup>. A first glance at the issue delivers an extremely broad range of initiatives. In addition to sex education and family life education initiatives discussed in the previous section, we find programmes aiming to raise public awareness<sup>65</sup>, reduce adolescent pregnancies<sup>66</sup>, promote laws<sup>67</sup>, increase the use of contraceptives<sup>68</sup>, promote policies<sup>69</sup>, meet the needs of the adolescents<sup>70</sup>, encourage abstinence<sup>71</sup>, forge inter-organisational cooperation<sup>72</sup>, promote responsible sexual behaviour<sup>73</sup>, train peers<sup>74</sup>, train health

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<sup>61</sup> WHO, 1997b.

<sup>62</sup> The porous boundary between the procedural and substantive sides of WHO conceptualisations of health promotion is a controversial area. One particularly important debate revolves around the place that social agency occupies in the process of promoting health. Kelly and Charlton (1995) claim for example that while new trends in health promotion advocate community participation, empowerment, etc., health promotion is still expert-driven, it is more intrusive than medicine, and it leaves communities “marginalised and invisible – other than in the rhetoric” (1995: 81). They go further to say that “for health promotion, free will is held up as a guideline principle, embedded in notions of empowerment and facilitation, while at the same time defining the social structure as acting on people in a deterministic way” (1995: 89).

<sup>63</sup> WHO 1992a, 1992b, 1986a; UNFPA 1998b: 12.

<sup>64</sup> UNFPA, 1997a, 1997b, 1998b, 1999.

<sup>65</sup> See for example PRB & PC, 1999; UNFPA, 1998b.

<sup>66</sup> See for example UN, 1995.

<sup>67</sup> See for example UNFPA, 1998b.

<sup>68</sup> See for example UN, 1997.

<sup>69</sup> See for example UNFPA, 1998b.

<sup>70</sup> See for example ODA, 1995; UN, 1995; UNFPA, 1997a, 1998b, 1999.

<sup>71</sup> See for example UN, 1995; UNFPA, 1998b; Howard and McCabe, 1990.

<sup>72</sup> See for example PRB & PC, 1999.

<sup>73</sup> See for example Ismartono, 1989.

<sup>74</sup> See for example Mbugua, 1989.



professionals<sup>75</sup>, increase use of services<sup>76</sup>, postpone first intercourse<sup>77</sup>, prevent STIs<sup>78</sup>. The list goes on. Moreover, the strategies for the achievement of these aims span from the production and delivery of information<sup>79</sup>, to the involvement of adolescents (as participants, leaders, promoters, peers, etc.)<sup>80</sup>, to school based education<sup>81</sup>, family planning courses<sup>82</sup>, organisation and community networking<sup>83</sup> and/or adult involvement<sup>84</sup>. These lists in turn feed themselves from the myriad of instruments and further strategies as those identified by Seedhouse. Any attempt to elaborate a taxonomic grid of current adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion initiatives will find itself trapped in a polymorphous web of partially connected conceptual ideas and implementation solutions.

Some overarching trends can be nevertheless identified within the apparently chaotic constellation of programmes. A principal concern that touches the core of most adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion initiatives is the overriding worry with “mak[ing] the transition to adulthood more successful and healthy”<sup>85</sup>. The transit character of adolescence provides both a conceptual infrastructure and a normative model for the inception of projects targeting the promotion of their health, diverting this particular area of health promotion from the procedural approach favoured by the WHO to a more substantive one. Despite the multiplicity of directions taken by promotion programmes, “transit to adulthood” appears to be the key concept on which promotion policy and practice are conceived. Biological, psychological and social aspects of the lives of boys and girls will be dealt with by these initiatives, which will combine them in countless ways, however, the “healthy

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<sup>75</sup> See for example UNFPA, 1998a.

<sup>76</sup> See for example Stewart, 1989.

<sup>77</sup> See for example Friedman, 1998.

<sup>78</sup> See for example UNFPA, 1997a, 1998b, 1999; ODA, 1995.

<sup>79</sup> See for example UN, 1997; UNFPA, 1997a, 1997b, 1999.

<sup>80</sup> See for example ODA, 1995; UN, 1995; UNFPA, 1997a, 1997b, 1998b, 1999.

<sup>81</sup> See for example Henderson *et al.*, 1998.

<sup>82</sup> See for example Mohamud, 1996.

<sup>83</sup> See for example Ruzani *et al.*, 1995.

<sup>84</sup> See for example UNFPA, 1998a.

adult” appears as ultimate concept on which interventions draw as much theoretical inspiration as normative force. A short excursion into the treatment of the relationship between adolescence, pregnancy and marriage may provide a helpful example here:

A prime issue of concern in adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion initiatives is adolescent pregnancy. Understood generally as a factor that put at risk the success of the transition into adulthood, adolescent pregnancy has been medicalised, condemned, pathologised, stigmatised, and confined to engineered extinction. Objective 7.44.b of the Programme of Action adopted in Cairo at the International Conference on population and Development unequivocally aims “To substantially reduce all adolescent pregnancies.”<sup>86</sup> All pregnant adolescents are seen to deviate from the healthy path to adulthood and as such the issue becomes immediately unacceptable<sup>87</sup>. It is not the aim of this discussion to address the phenomenon of adolescent pregnancy, but rather to articulate it in the light of the relationship between the contemporary notion of adolescence, adolescent sexuality and adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion initiatives.

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<sup>85</sup> Giarratano-Russell, 1998: 5. For a detailed account of these ideas see Senderowitz (1995).

<sup>86</sup> UN, 1995. Although it is not the focus of this chapter, it should be pointed out that the Malthusian connotations of this phrase are unequivocal. One out of ten births in the world are from adolescent mothers (UNFPA, 1997b). Moreover, the so-called ‘developing world’ accounts for around 85% of all adolescents and for the highest rates of teenage pregnancy (UNFPA, 1998a).

<sup>87</sup> The biological risks of the pregnant adolescent have been endlessly flagged as a reason why adolescent pregnancies should be reduced. However, the popular argument that a young woman is usually not ready for childbirth until she is at least 18 years old (UNFPA, 1997b) has been severely undermined by several studies. First, the higher biological risk does not apply to the 15 to 19 age group but to the 10 to 14 age group (UNFPA, 1998a; Villarreal, 1998), which in turn accounts well under 1% of adolescent pregnancies. Second, as a WHO report on problems associated to adolescent pregnancies has shown, these risks should be understood in terms of socio-economic factors rather than in terms of biological ones (WHO, 1989). Other aspects such as complications during delivery or lack of sufficient ante-natal care appear to be related to the health care providers rather than to the adolescents. For example, attitudes of health professionals keep adolescents away from seeking ante-natal care (UN, 1999); or inadequate assistance to adolescent mothers at birth generates delivery complications.

Looking closely at the debate among policy makers and practitioners on adolescent pregnancy, a World Bank discussion paper on adolescence<sup>88</sup> identifies, after aligning itself with Cairo's goals, the three main aspects of adolescent sexual health in need of consideration; there are as follows: population growth, STIs and adolescent pregnancy. Interestingly, under the leading gaze of the World Bank, the issue of adolescent pregnancy takes a singular turn. In depicting the scenario to be tackled, a new aspect enters the picture; the problem of teen pregnancy is described as follows: "the pregnancy rate among unmarried adolescents is higher than ever before in many countries."<sup>89</sup> Adult zealousness with adolescent pregnancy exercises a crucial twist, marriage. Adolescent pregnancy becomes differentiated between married and unmarried. For the unmarried pregnant adolescent a sea of torment lies ahead; however, the married pregnant adolescent faces, on the other hand, a different future.

The notion of adolescence is thus torn apart when it intersects with the institution of marriage; is a married pregnant adolescent an adolescent or is she not? If marriage marks the entry into adulthood, wouldn't the category 'married adolescent' be an empty one? We can attempt to overcome this logical dilemma by retreating to the chronological definition of adolescence discussed in the first section of this chapter and enquire on the age of the girl. Solving the puzzle in this way may well prove helpful for the demographer but it will leave the social inquirer with an unsavoury taste of incompleteness. In what ways does marriage invest adolescence? What are the impacts of marriage upon a pregnant adolescence? And upon a non-pregnant adolescent? Adolescence reaches unequivocally controversial dimensions when it comes to marriage. At points it seems that it is marriage, the fundamental landmark to adult entry, that will have the upper hand, defeating with the strength of a natural force any rivals that appear in the way, age included. In analysing the impact of the increasing gap between

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<sup>88</sup> Senderowitz, 1995.

first intercourse and marriage (another colourful synonym of the “biosocial gap”), Bongaarts and Cohen conclude that this issue potentially leads to “a higher prevalence of sexual activity, unplanned pregnancy and abortion among the unmarried.”<sup>90</sup> At this point, the terms of the relationship between adolescent pregnancy and adolescent marriage appear to have been inverted. Adolescence as a notion has vanished to the background and it is marriage that parts the waters on problems of sex, pregnancy and abortion. Adolescence, adolescent sexuality and, as we will see later, adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion, find a powerful normative anchor in marriage. Marriage seems to rise as a prime perspective for observing and judging what is right and what is wrong for adolescents. It plays a determinant role in giving the full shape to the individualised adolescent, and in particular to the individualised adolescent woman. From marriage onwards, teenagers become adults. As such they appear as naturally better qualified to handle sexual health issues more effectively than their unmarried counterparts. Marriage seems to deliver, at times, a somehow magical aura to adolescent problems, a magic that comes from the problematic nature of adolescence as much as from the naturalised, metaphysical, force of marriage<sup>91</sup>. Marriage heals; as if an obscure echo coming from the corridors of the Cairo Conference were pleading the experts and policy makers, gathered in hundreds to draw the fates of “future leaders of the nations”, ‘to substantially increase all adolescent marriages’.

Let us now leave behind the example of adolescent marriage and return to our main point here: adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion. There is a particular issue that, for the last decade, has captured streams of attention from research, policy and practice concerned with addressing the sexual and reproductive health promotion of the adolescents. This is: the full

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.: v.

<sup>90</sup> Bongaarts and Cohen, 1998: 101.

<sup>91</sup> Attridge-Stirling, 1998.

involvement of young people<sup>92</sup>. Policy makers, practitioners and researchers are encouraged to take up the challenge and incorporate adolescents -in theory as much as in practice- in every aspect of the health promotion process, from project conception and planning, through execution and monitoring, to evaluation. If a single catch phrase could capture the zeitgeist of the field it would be 'adolescent participation'. In short, adolescent participation appears singled out as a key ingredient for approaching, in a theoretically coherent and practically successful manner, most of the innumerable problems that affect their sexual and reproductive health, from pregnancies, to STIs, to use of services. In the remaining part of this section I will concentrate on academic, policy and practice debates around the issue of adolescent participation in the promotion of sexual and reproductive health.

Reviewing the field of adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion in the light of field evidence gathered during four years of world-wide implementation of the recommendations of the 1994 Cairo Consensus, a UNFPA Round Table<sup>93</sup> generated a list of key future actions oriented to improve health promotion programmes. Among these actions, the round table concluded that,

There is a need for the participation of adolescents of both sexes in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of activities that concern them. This is essential in order to ensure that action is effective and appropriate to local cultures. Young people have demonstrated their ability to contribute constructively to international forums, at regional committees, in national organisations and through community programmes. The door needs to be open much wider to welcome young people into an environment in which they can flourish in partnership with adults.<sup>94</sup>

The call for adolescent participation finds wide support. From supranational bodies and governmental agencies to local NGOs and grassroots community

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<sup>92</sup> See, for example, UN, 1999, 1995; UNFPA 1999, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1997b; IPPF 1994.

<sup>93</sup> UNFPA, 1998a.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.: 19.

organisations, attempts are made to put this maxim into practice<sup>95</sup>. The conceptual strengths and appeal of the notion of participation resides, as eloquently articulated in the UNFPA passage above, in the opening to the dual treatment of effectiveness and appropriateness. Participation, it is argued, promises to boys and girls a genuine opportunity for promoting their sexual health in a sensitive fashion. Moreover, it appears to pave the way for the implementation of more gender-sensitive treatments of sexual health issues, and above all, it opens the doors to instilling threads of democratic engagement onto the process of health promotion. UNFPA experts, as the passage above emphasises, unequivocally advocate a wide call for participation. Let us now leave the advocates of adolescent participation, and look at some of the key research carried out on this matter. In particular, let us explore one approach that probably has contributed the most, both at the level of theory and practice, to this quest for adolescent participation.

A widely acknowledged framework of adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion that attempts to involve adolescents is that of ‘peer education’. Peer education operates under the conceptual assumption that peer modelling is a basic socialisation process<sup>96</sup>. According to peer education tenets, adolescent will learn from model peers, mainly by observing them, and by exchanging and sharing information, values and behaviours pertaining, for example, to sexual health. This social learning process grounded in peer modelling, can be exploited and put into circulation, for example, in learning on sexual and reproductive health matters<sup>97</sup>.

Under these highly persuasive, but apparently simple and commonsense assumptions, countless programmes have attempted to stir the promotion of sexual and reproductive health via enacting the “youth to youth” pattern,

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<sup>95</sup> See for example, UNFPA 1998a, 1998b, 1998c.

<sup>96</sup> The seminal work of Bandura (1977, 1986) is usually acknowledged to be at the root of peer education.

<sup>97</sup> Sciacca, 1987.

thus allegedly actively involving the adolescents into the process<sup>98</sup>. The form and content of peer education sexual and reproductive health promotion programmes are multiple: from school-based to outreach, from single-sex to mixed, from attitude-change oriented to information-delivery oriented, etc. It is not the aim at this stage to review the voluminous literature on peer education in the context of reproductive and sexual health promotion<sup>99</sup>. Instead, I will focus on theoretical and practical problems that are central to this paradigmatic participatory framework. I will do so by looking at the theoretical understanding of socialisation and learning that guides peer education, and the quest for effective and appropriate adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion, advocated by peer education practice.

There is a far-reaching theoretical problem in peer education that inherently mars the quest for adolescent participation. In a nutshell, peer education reduces the world of adolescent social interaction to an intra-psychical process of learning by observing<sup>100</sup>. The adolescent is conceived as the key unit of analysis. He or she gets socialised by 'absorbing' knowledge 'released' by the model peers. According to this model, there is a sender (the model peer), there is a receiver (the learning peer), and there is a message (sexual health knowledge). These elements come together in a dynamic process of transmission of a message from a sender to a receiver. By breaking down the learning process in this way, and by considering that learning takes place 'inside' the individual adolescent, participation comes to be about taking part in a process of transmission of knowledge. The implications of this approach are captured succinctly by Kathryn Milburn, in a critical review of adolescent peer education:

At a basic level such interventions [peer health education] involve mature adults in developing or facilitating interventions with younger people, children or young adults, which aim,

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<sup>98</sup> See for example, Luna and Rotheram-Borus (1999), Phelps *et al.* (1994), HEA (1993), Mellanby *et al.* (1992).

<sup>99</sup> See for example, Turner and Shepherd (1999).

<sup>100</sup> See for example, the critique to the approach levied in Stainton Rogers *et al.* (1995).

through the manipulation of young people's social worlds, to promote 'healthier behaviours' or lifestyles. Fundamental questions arise about whose agenda is best served by such intervention, and whether 'adultist' definitions of what is good for health are necessarily seen as appropriate and relevant by younger sectors of society.<sup>101</sup>

In short, in such programmes the very concept of adolescent participation is brutalised. Adults are the ones in charge of setting the agenda in peer education programmes. Adolescent participation appears reduced to adult manipulation, not just of the young people who are allegedly taking part, but also of the information that is put in circulation, information that, following what was discussed at the beginning of the chapter, will pave the way to adolescent transit into proper adulthood; information that, if successfully transmitted, will go to fill the biosocial gap.

This theoretical problem lying at the heart of peer education assumptions, combined with the critique raised by Milburn, produces a quasi-explosive mix. First, by reducing social interaction (in particular, learning) to an individual process, knowledge and the subjects of knowledge (i.e. the adolescents) get broken down into elementary units. This reduction empties the social element from the notion of social interaction. Adolescent socialisation, and more specifically adolescent learning of sexual and reproductive health, becomes primarily an *individual* process; the social aspect is treated as the mere addition of individual processes. Moreover, by treating knowledge as information that is transmitted from one individual to another and disconnecting it from the subjects that transmit it, the approach opens to the critique so clearly raised by Milburn: whose agenda lies behind the knowledge that gets transmitted. Finally, by rendering dynamic the elementary units of the model in terms of transference of knowledge from a sender to a receiver, *adolescent participation gets conceptualised as a process of glassy transmission of information elaborated by the adults*. This information,

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<sup>101</sup> Milburn, 1996: 5.



primarily generated within the bio-medical discourses of reproductive health or the psychosocial discourses of family life education, will have the fundamental mission of guiding the adolescent in its transit into adulthood.

The brief discussion on the problematic nature of the conceptual treatment of the issue of adolescent participation presented above is just a small incursion into these issues. Nevertheless, participation, if understood and theorised differently from the transmission-based, adult-hegemonic approach reviewed so far, could still provide a valid opportunity for successful practical application of adolescent sexual health promotion programmes. However, we have also seen that it uncovers highly complex problems. Above all, the empirical evidence generated in the field<sup>102</sup> indicates that the issue of adolescent participation is far from being exhausted. More needs to be done both by researchers and practitioners if a more articulated grasp of the conceptual issues involved is to be achieved. This is precisely the topic of the coming chapter.

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<sup>102</sup> UN, 1999; UNFPA 1998c.

## Chapter 3

### Taking Part

The notion of participation has strongly captured the attention of those concerned with understanding and aiding the promotion of the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents. Involving adolescents seems to provide a valid way for improving their health; a 'participation turn' pervades the field<sup>1</sup>. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the conceptual grounds on which participatory adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion stands appear questionable at best. Disputes arise not only from problematic conceptualisations of adolescence, of adolescent sexual and reproductive health and of adolescent participation but more importantly, from the combination of all of them in practice. A crucial corollary of these deeply rooted conceptual problems is that in practice, far from seeing adolescents participating in the promotion of their sexual and reproductive health, what we witness is adult manipulation of adolescents, who are drawn into processes of transmission of information with little, if any, possibility of genuinely taking part. In short, social participation and creativity gives way to individual compliance.

Unveiling "flaws in the theory of reasoned action", Susan Kippax and June Crawford eloquently expressed the need for "a theory or model which will capture both the social processes of change and the social nature of the change itself: a model in which people collectively appropriate and construct

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<sup>1</sup> Adolescent participation appears to be just one component of a broader trend towards the involvement of the interested parties in the improvement of their health. For reviews of the pervasiveness and variety of participatory approaches to health promotion see, for example, Naidoo & Wills (1994), Beattie (1991), Caplan and Holland (1990), and French and Adams (1986). For a review of participatory health promotion within Latin American contexts see Arvizu Whittemore and Buelow (1999). For more critical views on the concept of participation see for example, Hall (1988) and Petersen and Lupton (1996).

new meanings and practices.”<sup>2</sup> Kippax and Crawford point out that *change*, as a central aspect of health promotion, is in desperate need of a theoretical framework that does justice to its “social nature”. As seen in the pervious chapter, adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion is no exception.

In this chapter I will dig into the universe of social action understood in terms of “people collectively appropriating and constructing new meanings and practices”, with the aim of contributing to the need identified by Kippax and Crawford. In a nutshell, the goal here is to put forward a social psychological framework for understanding and aiding adolescent participation in sexual health promotion, which includes the subjectivity of the actors taking part. In particular, I will propose that the lifeblood of participatory processes lies primarily within the agency of the participants themselves and as such, any attempt to do justice to the concept of participation must take this into consideration.

For the development of the conceptual framework outlined above, I will generate a dialogue between the work of two social thinkers who have greatly contributed to this pursuit: Jürgen Habermas and Paulo Freire. This effort is by no means novel<sup>3</sup>; nevertheless, the conceptual richness treasured within the prolific work of both thinkers provides me with inspiration and motivation to delve into their writings. Habermas and Freire side together on key conceptual issues, for example, the power of language in forming beliefs, actions and utterances, as much as in disclosing the world; the productive capacity of dialogue; the necessary embeddedness of communicative practices in lifeworld contexts; and the interdependence between language, communication and lifeworld. More importantly, they share a life long

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<sup>2</sup> Kippax and Crawford, 1993: 256. See also Lupton (1995) and Petersen and Lupton (1996).

<sup>3</sup> These endeavours reach very diverse fields such as social theory studies (Morrow and Torres, 1995), nurse training (Fulton, 1997; Harden, 1996; Kendall, 1992), race studies (Flecha,

commitment to democratic values, collective participation and equality, as much as a deep opposition to science's claims of neutrality; all necessary ingredients if the matter at stake is the understanding of collective struggle over meaning. As intellectuals, Freire and Habermas never gave up political commitment, fully aware of the inseparability of the two.

This chapter is divided into three sections. I will dedicate the first section to deal with some conceptual contributions of Jürgen Habermas. I will look at Habermas's understanding of social action, focusing on the analysis made and implications drawn by Habermas from the notions of communicative and purposive action. In doing so, I hope to shed light on key interdependencies between language, meaning and intersubjectivity; on the reproductive capacity of communicative actions; and on the circular relation involving communicative actors and the lifeworld.

Habermas's communication theory will provide the background against which Paulo Freire's pedagogy will be introduced and discussed. This will be the focus of the second part of the chapter. The aim will be to articulate Freire's approach in the light of Habermas's social theory. In particular, I will argue that the integration of the two perspectives offers fertile ground for making sense of the interplay between intersubjectivity, communicative practices and lifeworld contexts in participatory processes of social change. To this end, I will analyse Freire's notions of "development of critical consciousness" and "dialogic action" from the perspective of Habermas's communication theory of society. I will suggest that in doing this, we are in a position to better grasp the implications of these concepts for the understanding of the practice of participation.

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1999; O'Neill, 1985), adult education (Pietrykowski, 1996) and education policy (Misgeld, 1985).

Section three of this chapter will outline, by building on the Habermasian reading of Freire's pedagogy, some basic features for a critical framework for participatory adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion. I will propose an approach that exploits the reflexivity potential present in communicative practices and conceives of *participation as a social process of creation through which those taking part in it shape knowledge, as much as social relations, as much as themselves*. In a nutshell, I will argue that by understanding participation as a social process of creation rather than as a process of transmission, we are in a position to address the problematic nature of the conceptualisations of adolescence, adolescent sexual health, and participation discussed in chapter two.

### **1. A social psychological reading of Jürgen Habermas's critical theory**

A sociology that accepts meaning as a basic concept, cannot separate the social system from the structure of personality; it is always also social psychology.<sup>4</sup>

As subjects capable of speech and action, we have, prior to all science, an *internal* connection to the symbolically structured lifeworld, to the products and competencies of socialised individuals. I have never understood why in the sciences we should be limited to the *external* connection we have to nature, why we should separate ourselves from our pre-theoretical knowledge and make the lifeworld artificially unfamiliar –even if we could do so. Rat psychology might well be good for rats.<sup>5</sup>

In an attempt to orient the focus of attention of a critical social science, Habermas reminds us that, if our aim is to make sense of the “pre-theoretical”, everyday life knowledge that subjects collectively and ceaselessly create and recreate, then we must hold tight to social psychology. For this endeavour, he draws a porous circle around this “basic concept of meaning”. Through this porosity the social and the individual flow

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<sup>4</sup> Habermas, 1988: 365.

inseparably, internally and externally connected, escaping the abstractive endeavours both of a sociology too narrowly focused on the former and of a psychology over-preoccupied with the latter. Habermas suggests instead a social psychology that looks at meaning as it irremediably unfolds in language, as it moves in communication to and from the lifeworld<sup>6</sup>, as it coalesces in stocks of knowledge, as it compresses into values and norms, as it condenses into identities, as it appears embodied in cultural artefacts, institutional orders and, literally, human bodies<sup>7</sup>. The centrality of meaning, in Habermas, unequivocally displaces the subject, who in turn, tirelessly comes back to the fore as the unique agent capable of putting communication in circulation, “All meaning comes together in the marketplace of everyday communicative practices.”<sup>8</sup>

How would a social psychology grounded in language and centred on communicative practices weave in the thinking and acting subject? How do communicative practices relate to communicative actors? And to their contexts? What implications can be drawn from these questions for the understanding of social processes? In this section I will attempt to generate a dialogue between key concerns of social psychology like human language and communication, and Habermas’s interests in a *social* psychology. With this ambitious goal in mind, I will explore some of Habermas’s studies on the matter as they developed along more than three decades of his prolific research in the field, focusing on particular points of cross-fertilisation between these studies and social psychology.

For Habermas, as for Mead and Vygotsky, language constitutes a medium rather than a means; it is through the linguistic medium that we become

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<sup>5</sup> Habermas, 1992a: 20.

<sup>6</sup> Habermas understands the lifeworld “as the horizon within which communicative actions are ‘always already’ moving” (Habermas, 1987a: 119). This ‘working conceptualisation’ of the lifeworld will be expanded along this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Habermas, 1987a.

<sup>8</sup> Habermas, 1998a: 250.

subjects, “everything that earns the name of subjectivity, even if it is a being-familiar-with-oneself, no matter how preliminary, is indebted to the unrelentingly individuating force possessed by the linguistic medium of formative processes”.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, this force accomplishes simultaneously two fundamental operations, which unequivocally mark individuals. Hand in hand with individuation, there unfolds a constitutive process of socialisation<sup>10</sup>. Individuation and socialisation appear inextricably tied to each other by language. The more we become individuated, the more we become related to others; language acts as the medium for these concomitant processes. According to Habermas, this mutual materialisation of individuation and socialisation owes its occurrence to an intersubjectivity that is linguistically disclosed as it is linguistically generated. Intersubjectivity, understood as the prime locus of production and reproduction of symbols, is as dependent on speaking and acting subjects as it is on language. An intersubjective understanding of individuation/socialisation processes has far-reaching consequences. Let us explore these in more detail.

The notion of an individuated subject has built into it the notion of a socialised subject<sup>11</sup>. The concomitant processes of individuation and

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<sup>9</sup> Habermas, 1992a: 25.

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed account of Habermas understanding of “individuation through socialisation” see Habermas (1992a), “Individuation through socialisation: on George Herbert Mead’s theory of subjectivity”. For Mead’s studies on the mutually constitutive relationship between individuation and socialisation see Mead (1964), in particular “Social Consciousness and the Consciousness of Meaning” and “The Social Self”; and Mead (1934). For Vygotsky’s elaborations on the “social co-operation road” that defines child development see Vygotsky and Luria’s “Tool and Symbol in Child Development” (1994). Habermas acknowledges his indebtedness to Mead’s insights, as he clearly shows it for example, in volume II of his Theory of Communicative Action (Habermas, 1987a). On the other hand Vygotsky’s work does not feature as frequently in his elaborations, something that Habermas himself recognises as a neglect (Habermas, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Conceiving the former without prescinding from the latter puts under new light key notions that are central to the understanding of the socialised individual. It helps, for example, to discern between the concept of *autonomy*, as the reassurance of the self, via the recognition of others, and the concept of *freedom of choice*, as the horizon of preferences of an individual immersed in a world of objects (Habermas, 1992a). It helps to differentiate between the notion of *solidarity*, as an unequivocal responsibility for the integrity of a shared life context, and that of *benevolence*, as the unitary concern of an individual with her fellow individuals (Habermas, 1990b).

socialisation generate an inherently social self. As such the self's dependence on both language and Other calls for it to be understood as a human phenomenon although not to be dissolved within a human embodiment. There is no simple physical relation between self and individual. Rather the understanding of the location of the self cannot do away with the self's lifeblood, that is, with language. For Habermas, as for Mead, the self's "eccentric position attests to the tenacious dependence of subjectivity upon language as a medium through which one recognises oneself in a non objectivating manner."<sup>12</sup> It is language that inhabits and gives rise to the intersubjective space in which recognition and reassurance of one self as an individuated being before an Other, before all Others, develops. According to Habermas this generative three-fold relationship between self, other and language sees the self as,

dependent upon recognition by addressees because it generates itself as a response to the demands of an other in the first place. ... The ego, which seems to me to be given in my self-consciousness as what is purely my own, cannot be maintained by me solely through my own power, as it were for me alone – it does not 'belong' to me. Rather, this ego always retains an intersubjective core because the process of individuation from which it emerges runs through the network of linguistically mediated interactions.<sup>13</sup>

For Habermas, this intersubjective core that, embedded in the linguistic medium binds and bonds self to other, crystallises around the very act of *reaching understanding*. Reaching understanding is, for Habermas, the inherent end of human speech; in turn language cannot be comprehended apart from the understanding that it is achieved in it. In Habermas's words, "the medium of natural language and the telos of reaching mutual understanding reciprocally interpret one another – the one cannot be explained without recourse to the other."<sup>14</sup> The intersubjective understanding reached in language between partners in interaction plays a fundamental role not only in

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<sup>12</sup> Habermas, 1992a: 178.

<sup>13</sup> Habermas, 1992a: 170.



the emergence and stabilisation of the self and in the individuation and socialisation of the subject but also in the coordination of social action and the production and transmission of knowledge<sup>15</sup>. This insight impacts widely on the understanding of social order. Habermas proposes a reconstruction of social action based on the notion of reaching understanding in language. He goes further to develop a critical theory of society that rests on the notion of action oriented to reaching understanding, or as he conceptualises it, *communicative action*<sup>16</sup>. Let us explore these ideas of Habermas further. Before doing so however, it is necessary to locate Habermas's approach in a wider context. His critical theory of society is immersed in a debate that hits at the heart of twentieth century philosophy. In particular, it contests the monolithic understanding of the thinking and acting subject; in so doing it shakes the very project of Modernity in general.

The paradigm shift that along the twentieth century crystallised around language<sup>17</sup>, in opposition to the generative status granted to the thinking and acting subject, reaches Habermas's work as much as others'. Meaning, language and the linguistic understanding of the subject are also central to key philosophical traditions such as structuralism and post-structuralism. All put into question the philosophy of the subject; in all language plays a central role. However, these approaches are far from being reduced to the other. Structuralism "traces the achievements of the knowing and acting subject, who is bound up in his linguistic practices, back to the foundational structures and generative rules of a grammar."<sup>18</sup> Postructuralism overcomes the supremacy of the subject by focusing on "'practices', understood as a way

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<sup>14</sup> Habermas, 1994a: 48.

<sup>15</sup> Habermas, 1984, 1987a.

<sup>16</sup> In his latest writings Habermas makes a distinction between action oriented to reaching understanding and action oriented to reaching agreement. He calls the former *weak* communicative action and the latter *strong* communicative action (Habermas, 1998a). For the purpose of the discussion in this chapter I use communicative action in an undifferentiated, more generic conceptualisation.

<sup>17</sup> Habermas, 1987b.

<sup>18</sup> Habermas, 1992a: 208.

of acting and thinking at once, that provide the intelligibility key for the correlative constitution of the subject and the object.”<sup>19</sup> Habermas, in turn puts forward a paradigm grounded on reaching mutual understanding in language, as a way of uncovering the intersubjective structure of reciprocal recognition lying at the heart of the very notion of self, society and culture<sup>20</sup>. For Habermas “reaching understanding is the inherent telos of human speech.”<sup>21</sup> This is precisely articulated in Habermas’s notion of *communicative action*, or action oriented to reaching understanding. Communicative action provides a powerful tool for transiting from the realm of the philosophy of language through a sociology grounded in the centrality of meaning, to a social psychology of subjects exercising their competencies to express their subjectivity, interact with others and represent the world they live in.

Habermas’s thesis can be briefly outlined as follows, action oriented to reaching understanding is the fundamental type of social action.<sup>22</sup> Living parasitically on communicative action, is the notion of *strategic action*, in which actors are oriented to consequences or outcomes and try to influence their opponents by means such as threats or enticements<sup>23</sup>. Although Habermas makes clear that both in communicative and strategic action a teleological structure is presupposed, the mechanisms that coordinate each make them quite distinct. While in the latter there is a dependency on the meshing of egocentric utility calculations, in the former coordination is dependent on agreement on both situation definition and prospective outcomes. Communicative action relies both on a speaker “raising a validity claim”, and on a hearer “taking (however implicitly) a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ position”<sup>24</sup>. The interaction becomes the focus of attention. The orientation to mutual

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<sup>19</sup> Foucault, 1998: 463.

<sup>20</sup> Habermas, 1984, 1987a, 1987b.

<sup>21</sup> Habermas, 1984: 287. Habermas is certainly aware of the myriad of other modes of language use; however, he identifies orientation to reaching understanding as the “original mode”, upon which all others live parasitically.

<sup>22</sup> Cooke, 1998; Brand, 1990.

<sup>23</sup> Habermas, 1990a.

<sup>24</sup> Habermas, 1984: 287.

understanding and the interpretative accomplishments of the participants respectively open and populate the intersubjective space in which the problem at stake will be framed and dealt with. Shared understanding on the issue or issues thematised in the interaction provides the basis for a definition of the situation and for possible courses of action. In turn, actors' relation to their 'small world' under thematisation is unavoidably dependent on, and structured by language. In short, while the speech situation provides a structure for the fulfilment of communicative roles, language provides a grammar for relating to the various aspects of this small world and for determining what perspective will orient this relation<sup>25</sup>. Let us look into some guiding threads inspiring Habermas's endeavour to look into the structure and performative sides of language to better understand the grounding of social action, and moreover, of social order.

A first goal that Habermas attempts to fulfil via his notion of communicative action is to expand and integrate the understanding of social action. He challenges a long standing tradition in the social sciences that conceptualises social action and social order from a narrow teleological view, that is, from the perspective of the individual actor striving for personal success. This approach, which finds an anchor in the philosophy of the subject, is a far-

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<sup>25</sup> An example might help to shed light on this complex, nevertheless central issue. Speaker (S) asks hearer (H): 'Could you please make me a cup of tea?' H responds: 'No, I'm not your servant'. The action situation revolving apparently on a simple request for tea ('prima facie' presumed as understood by S and H) is at the same time a speech situation in which H and S's communicative roles appear to be an exchange of first and second person participant perspectives. Moreover, S uses language in an interactive fashion through a regulative speech act (S appeals to H commitment to deliver S's request). On the other hand, H rejects S's request on a normative basis (contesting the normative validity of S's request). H could have rejected the request on 'objective' grounds (e.g. No, there's no tea in the house and all shops are closed), or on subjective grounds, e.g. H distrusts S (e.g. No, you don't want tea you just want me to leave the room). H could have accepted the request, committing himself to making a cup of tea. Once H's commitment to make tea is expressed and accepted by S, the communicative action progresses into a purposive action (the coordination demands have been fulfilled on the basis of mutual understanding of both situation definition (S and H shared -in this case implicitly- the knowledge about making tea, about asking for a favour and delivering it, about expressing wishes, etc.) and prospective outcomes (H's commitment to make tea)). For example, H makes the tea (probably no social interaction is involved here), and S carries on with her life (e.g. she goes back to watching TV).

reaching one, and has gathered support both along the centuries and across disciplines. It appears for example, in the 'Hobbesian problem' in political theory, in game theory in economics, or in planned behaviour and social identity theories in social psychology. Habermas strongly argues for an approach that does make justice to the "transsubjective" character of "binding validity claims", something not captured by a perspective narrowly focused on "the double contingency of rationally deciding independent actors". In this respect he points out that "more promising than the attempt to renew the classical concept of an instrumental order with modern means is an approach that makes use of a special concept of a medium of communication that steers behaviour."<sup>26</sup> It is precisely the notion of communicative action which, grounded in an intersubjective understanding of actors, turns the attention to the complex social core of communication.

Habermas takes his distinction between the communicative and the teleological sides of action into the implications that this has on the debate on reason and rationality, one central to the project of Modernity. By focusing on intersubjective communication rather than individual's purposive action, Habermas argues that an "irreducible", "peculiar rationality" arises. He identifies it as *communicative rationality*; one that is inherent in the "communicative use of linguistic expressions", that "is expressed in the unifying force of speech oriented toward reaching understanding, which secures for the participating speakers an intersubjectively shared lifeworld".<sup>27</sup>

By differentiating purposive rationality from communicative rationality Habermas unveils the Janus Face of agreement reached in communication and derives from it strong implications for the understanding of social order. Communicative rationality displaces reason from the substantive to the procedural. Reason loses its direct relationship to knowledge withdrawing

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<sup>26</sup> Habermas, 1994a: 63.

<sup>27</sup> Habermas, 1998a: 315.

into the idealisations and presuppositions held by speakers in communication. In this journey knowledge becomes context-dependent, open to problematisation, to be redeemed 'here and now' in linguistic practices. At the same time there is a "moment of unconditionality" built in these communicative practices; a bit of ideality that breaks into the everyday life of subjects capable of speech and action, as linguistic communication and mutual understanding rely on claims to validity that "in the end can be resolved only with arguments."<sup>28</sup>

By giving centrality to the notion of reason Habermas makes clear his endeavour of furthering the project of Modernity. Nevertheless, by understanding reason as grounded in 'procedural' elements, as they are found in language and performed in linguistic practices, Habermas carves a space for it within human communication and shared understanding. Reason loses its claim to unitary thinking while rising as a force that unifies diverse voices, "a reason that unites without effacing separation, that binds without unnamable difference, that points out the common and the shared among strangers, without depriving the other of otherness."<sup>29</sup>

A second aspect that is of central interest to Habermas's project can be very succinctly summarised as the challenge to the supremacy of the notion of truth in linguistic practices. Habermas's 'expanded' notion of social action, by encompassing the purposive and the communicative, does justice to the *simultaneity* of occurrence of the 'representative', the 'interactive' and the 'expressive' sides of language use. Habermas argues that there is a lack of

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<sup>28</sup> Habermas, 1994b: 102. Habermas's post-metaphysical understanding of reason implies an on-going tension inherent in language and linguistic practices and pervading all knowledge of the 'outside' world and the 'social' world. In the light of this tension, "reason can withdraw into the idealisations of validity claims and the formal-pragmatic presupposition of worlds; it renounces every form of totalising knowledge, no matter how concealed, while nonetheless requiring from the communication community -set in their contingent lifeworld contexts- a universalist anticipation of a muted 'transcendence from within' that does justice to the irrefutably unconditional character of what is held-to-be-true and what ought-to-be." (Habermas, 1998a: 338).

theorising in the social sciences on the *simultaneous* treatment of the various functions of language use. In particular, privilege has been given to representative function of language. In Habermas's view,

Speech acts serve not only to represent (or presuppose) states and events in the *objective world*. They also serve to produce (or renew) interpersonal relationships –in which case the speaker makes reference to something in the *social world* of legitimately ordered interactions. And they serve to express lived experience, that is, they serve the process of self-representation –in which case the speaker makes reference to something in the *subjective world* to which he has privileged access.<sup>30</sup>

Habermas is interested in showing that in *every* communicative action we raise simultaneously claims on all three worlds (objective, social and subjective). The addressee in the interaction will accept or reject the validity of what was claimed generally focusing on one of these three worlds. Communicative actions, following Habermas, are far reaching. Action coordination via communicative action means that with every speech act all three 'worlds' are affected; actors re-create knowledge, re-produce solidarities, and become simultaneously individualised and socialised. The consequences of this approach are explained by Habermas, as follows:

communicative action is not only a process of reaching understanding; in coming to an understanding about something in the world, actors are at the same time taking part in interactions through which they develop, confirm and renew their memberships in social groups and their own identities. Communicative actions are not only processes of interpretation in which cultural knowledge is 'tested against the world'; they are at the same time processes of social integration and of socialisation.<sup>31</sup>

A third central concern that Habermas is interested in unveiling is the treatment of the competences demanded of acting and speaking subjects. Habermas sets to go beyond the tradition of research that focuses on the

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<sup>29</sup> Habermas, 1994b: 119-20.

<sup>30</sup> Habermas, 1990a:136.

<sup>31</sup> Habermas, 1987a: 139.

acquisition of language in terms of an ability to master, however intuitively, the complex system of abstract linguistic rules<sup>32</sup>. In this respect, he elaborates the notion of *communicative competence* or “the ability to ‘embed’ language in a network of relations to different orders of reality”<sup>33</sup>. The shift from a confined focus on language, i.e. the understanding of the mastery of sentences, to a broader one on communication, i.e. the understanding of the mastery of both sentences *and* modes of communication, entails a series of significant consequences. If we connect this ample notion of competence to the three distinct functions of communicative action (i.e. reach understanding about something in the ‘objective’, social and subjective worlds) then three different types of competencies will result. Habermas names them as “cognitive”, “interactive” and “expressive” competences respectively<sup>34</sup>. These competences must not be reduced to one another. On the contrary, they articulate the breadth of factors intervening in the process of social interaction. Habermas argues that not enough attention has been paid to the distinctive traits of these three types of competence. In particular, cognitive competence has overshadowed the importance of interactive and expressive competencies. By keeping them separate and treating them within their specificity, the mutually dependent relationship between language and human interaction appears under a different, more complex nevertheless richer perspective.

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<sup>32</sup> Habermas takes specific issue with Chomsky’s studies on linguistic competence, which ascertain that this competence is a monological capability traceable to “species-specific equipment of the solitary human organism” (Habermas, 1970: 361). For Habermas, Chomsky too is trapped in the philosophy of the subject that attempts to explain inherently social phenomena by looking at the individual in isolation, “a situation in which speech, i.e. the application of linguistic competence, becomes in principle possible, depends on a structure of intersubjectivity which is in turn linguistic” (367). Habermas criticisms of Chomsky’s studies are particularly oriented towards unveiling the difficulties arising from attempting to provide a theory of meaning that does not take intersubjectivity into consideration. Such an approach, Habermas argues, is unable to provide a consistent theory of meaning, that is, one in a position to elicit form within it “*all possible* global interpretations of nature and society”.

<sup>33</sup> McCarthy, 1978: 282.

<sup>34</sup> Habermas, 1997a.

A fourth necessary element for understanding the implications for social theory of Habermas's notions of communicative and strategic actions is the relationship between these actions and the ever receding horizon within which they take place, that is, the *lifeworld*<sup>35</sup>. "Our intersubjectively shared, overlapping lifeworlds lay down a broad background consensus, without which our everyday praxis simply couldn't take place."<sup>36</sup> The lifeworld offers "both an intuitively pre-understood *context* for an action situation and *resources* for the interpretative processes in which participants in communication engage".<sup>37</sup> Habermas argues, drawing on the work of Husserl, that participants in social interaction find themselves "always already" within the lifeworld. The lifeworld provides a necessary "meaning infrastructure" for communication to take place. As such it is 'inescapable' for subjects acting communicatively, who cannot "take up an extramundane position in relation to their lifeworld"<sup>38</sup>.

Although Habermas draws on Husserl's work for his elaboration of the notion of the lifeworld, a crucial aspect divides both philosophers. While Husserl introduces the notion of the lifeworld in order to single out the "immediate present sphere of primary achievements", he, according to Habermas, does "not recognise that the lifeworld itself rests on the idealising assumptions of communicative action".<sup>39</sup> Language as the medium for reaching understanding provides for the very maintenance of the lifeworld. In so doing a complex relationship arises. On the one hand, a communicative actor is both "an *initiator* who masters situations through actions for which he is accountable and a *product* of the traditions surrounding him, of groups

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<sup>35</sup> The lifeworld is, for Habermas, one of the two components of society. Indeed, Habermas understands society as both lifeworld and system. The articulation of these two elements of society, in particular the inter-relations between system and lifeworld appear developed in Volume II of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1987a). The analysis of system aspects of society goes beyond the scope of this chapter, which focus on the lifeworld, in particular on the interplay between it and communicative action.

<sup>36</sup> Habermas, 1994b: 111.

<sup>37</sup> Habermas, 1990a: 136.

<sup>38</sup> Habermas, 1987a: 125.



whose cohesion is based on solidarity to which he belongs, and of processes of socialisation in which he is reared.”<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, “the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld ... can only take place through communicative action”<sup>41</sup>.

Starting from the assumption that there is an inherent telos in language, that is, to reach understanding, Habermas elaborated the notion of communicative action and he singled it out as the basic type of social action. Resting on intersubjective agreement, language used with communicative intents becomes the prime medium for the socialisation and individuation of subjects, for the creation and renewal of solidarities as well as for the transmission of culture; in short, for the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld, in which participants in communication always find themselves. This analysis opens a conceptual space for the notion of intersubjectivity that reaches as far as the location of the self, the effecting of social coordination and the understanding of knowledge. Intersubjectivity permeates everyday life, from simple reproduction processes such as conventions or greetings to fundamental issues related to the self-understanding of a society.

Inasmuch as communicative actions coordinate routinised aspects of everyday life, the yes or no of participants acting communicatively will be simply based on the “shared, unproblematical convictions” provided by the lifeworld’s “massive background consensus”<sup>42</sup>. What happens however, when controversial issues arise that shake the certainties of the lifeworld and, on the other hand, find the interested parties not switching into strategic action?

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<sup>39</sup> Habermas, 1994a: 68.

<sup>40</sup> Habermas, 1990a: 135.

<sup>41</sup> Habermas, 1985: 174.

<sup>42</sup> Habermas, 1994a: 66.

According to Habermas, when individuals problematise validity claims, communicative action acquires a reflexive status, it becomes *discourse*<sup>43</sup>. In discourse participants in interaction put forward reasons that support the claims raised. The discursive interplay of reasons rests, as does communicative action, on the participants' "uninfringeable freedom to respond with a 'yes' or 'no'" and on their "empathetic sensitivity to each other"<sup>44</sup>. Habermas finds inspiration for his notion of discourse in Stephen Toulmin's theory of argumentation, which provides a highly articulated mechanism for discursive redemption of controversial validity claims<sup>45</sup>. Discourses take specific characteristics depending on the 'world' that is under problematisation. His detailed analysis of the typology of discourse exceeds the scope of this discussion.<sup>46</sup> However, what it is important to point out here, is that Habermas singles out the reliance of discursive practices on the "unforced force of the better argument" as the common denominator shared by the various types of discourse.

Habermas provides, from the perspective of his critical theory of society, original conceptualisations of social action and social order that are built on the notion of communicative action. Action oriented to reaching understanding is central to Habermas's project. In reaching intersubjective agreement, actors get socialised and simultaneously individualised, they create and renew solidarities, and they re-produce culture. The centrality of the intersubjective element gets reinforced by the claim that in proceeding consensually actors are relying on the rational potential inherent in language;

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<sup>43</sup> The concept of discourse bears a plethora of meanings in social science. In this chapter, I use the conceptualisation of the word discourse put forward by Habermas (1984, 1990a).

<sup>44</sup> Habermas, 1990a: 202.

<sup>45</sup> Habermas (1984) analyses in detail Toulmin's argumentation theory as elaborated in "The Uses of Arguments" (1958).

<sup>46</sup> See Habermas (1984) for a detailed discussion on the matter. Briefly, if parties in interaction are redeeming a controversy with respect to something in the 'objective' world, then the discourse will take the shape of a theoretical one. If the 'social' world is the one under problematisation, the discourse, following Habermas, will be a practical one. Finally, the problematisations of the 'subjective' world will be addressed either as aesthetic criticism or therapeutic critique.

communicative rationality secures a horizon for intersubjectivity to arise and develop. This kernel of reason located within linguistic practices demands a similar conceptualisation of the competencies that are demanded from speaking and acting subjects. In this respect, the notion of communicative competence attempts to do justice to necessarily social elements that intervene in the processes of human communication. The ability to engage in discourse demands that human skills do not get reduced to the ability to master a language but, on the other hand, that this get expanded, in Mead's words, to the ability to "take up the role of the other". Again intersubjectivity and the social core of communication come to the fore.

Habermas's elaborations allow us to frame subjectivity and knowledge of the world, issues so central to social psychology, in inherently social terms. Understood as intersubjectivity, the horizon expands bringing within it an understanding of social norms and cultural traditions, which are also inherently social. Habermas works his way through language to "bring to the open the rational potential intrinsic in everyday communicative practices."<sup>47</sup> In so doing he paves the way for a social psychology fully constructed in intersubjective terms; a social psychology in a position to inquire on the unfolding of communicative practices, as they mould subjectivity, as they generate, reproduce or challenge social norms, and as they acquire, transmit or critique cultural knowledge. A social psychology that places an unequivocal stress on the social core of the self, of norms, and of knowledge stands in a position of privilege to contribute to the understanding of these issues. The flip side of this understanding is the unveiling of the social core of, for example, individual pathologies, unjust norms and oppressive traditions, whose unmasking and condemnation also becomes part and parcel of the project of a *social* psychology. To put it in the words of Paulo Freire "If men and women created the ugly world that we are denouncing, then men

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<sup>47</sup> Habermas, 1992b: 442.

and women can create a world that is less discriminatory and more humane.”<sup>48</sup>

## **2. Freire’s pedagogy: critical theory meets critical practice**

The pedagogy of Paulo Freire<sup>49</sup> makes a genuine case for Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: “philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it”<sup>50</sup>. With a revolutionary approach to education and over forty years of prolific work in the field of adult literacy, Paulo Freire represents a clear and profound example of theory and practice fused with political engagement. His pedagogy brings to the fore themes that are as challenging as they are unavoidable. It points our attention to the inextricable relation between learning words and reflecting on the kind of world these words generate; to the necessary dialogue that teacher and student engage in as the education process unfolds. It is a pedagogy that lays bare the cultural, ethical and subjective dimensions of education. In short, it is a pedagogy that equates education to active participation, to constant doubting of existing social orders. For Freire, the everyday life environment of ordinary people is the privileged arena for education, and language its most powerful weapon.

It is not the aim of this section to review in its entirety the work of Paulo Freire<sup>51</sup>. Rather, I will concentrate here on specific aspects of Freire’s work. I will critically review Freire’s understanding of language, dialogue and social action and particularly, the role these concepts play in his conceptualisation of participatory processes of education. This review will be carried out in

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<sup>48</sup> Freire, 1997: 315.

<sup>49</sup> Freire, 1998, 1997, 1984, 1983, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1970.

<sup>50</sup> Marx, in West, 1993.

<sup>51</sup> Reviews of Freire’s work have been produced almost un-interruptedly since his first books were published. See for example, Grabowsky (1972), Gleeson (1974), Mackie (1980), Beisiegel (1982), Shor (1987), McLaren and Leonard, (1993) and Freire *et al.* (1997).

constant dialogue with Habermas's contributions to these issues. My goal here to show that a better understanding of the conceptual strength of Freire's work can be achieved by re-framing Freire's pedagogy within the communication paradigm put forward by Habermas. In particular, I will argue that Freire's notion of "development of critical consciousness"<sup>52</sup> attains newer levels of depth if analysed under the lenses of a communication theory of society.

Freire shares with Habermas the "radical demand to conceive of men as beings that cannot be outside communication, since they are communication."<sup>53</sup> This equating of the subject to communication entails a peculiar dissolution of the individual; it disappears behind the overriding power of communication to reappear as the agent of communication. The figure of a displaced subject eternally returning in communication is a constant mark in Freire's theorising, "it is not possible to speak of an actor in singular, even less possible of actors in general, but rather of actors in intersubjectivity, in intercommunication."<sup>54</sup> Freire's shift from the individual actor to the intersubjective is made possible by his understanding of the subject in communicative terms. In so proceeding, intersubjectivity becomes central, the key to the understanding of both language and the subject. Language ceases to be conceived as a glassy transmitter merely connecting two individuals but rather as a generative force that makes the social relation at all possible. In turn, the agent rises as the privileged actor in a position to 'make' language possible. Both intersubjectivity and language lie at the core of Freire's work; both share a quality, they produce. Let us look at these points in more detail.

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<sup>52</sup> The use of the term "development of critical consciousness" is intended as a synonym for Freire's notion of "conscientização" (Freire, 1984), which does not have a direct English translation.

<sup>53</sup> Freire, 1970: 126.

<sup>54</sup> Freire, 1970: 127.

Freire developed most of his work in the field of adult literacy. (Although, as mentioned above, his enterprise has spread well beyond the original domain.) As an adult educator himself, and in line with his understanding of the subject in communicative terms, he characterises the relationship between teacher and student as one of production and not of sole transmission<sup>55</sup>. At best, the teacher possesses certain skills that the student does not, and only these objects will be transmitted. For example, a teacher knows how to read and write and can teach a student this particular skill. However Freire makes clear that the process of learning how to read or write words cannot be detached from the process of understanding and sharing the world that both teacher and student live in. A crucial distinction is set between “techniques of reading and writing” and literacy as “communicating graphically”<sup>56</sup>. Both domains, the technical and the communicative, appear as one in the process of literacy, nevertheless these should not be conceptually confused with, nor practically reduced to, one other. As Freire points out,

Language is not exclusively a medium for expressing the impressions we have vis-a-vis the world. Language is also knowledge in itself. And language implies the intelligibility of a world that does not exist without communication. What I want to say is that it is impossible to access meaning simply through reading words. One must first read the world in which these words exist.<sup>57</sup>

Reading (and writing) the “word” is inseparable from reading (and writing) the “world”; knowledge of the word and knowledge of the world in which the student and teacher live go hand in hand. Grasping the meaning of words, apprehending them, reflecting on them, problematising them, unavoidably involves grasping, apprehending, reflecting, problematising the meaning of the worlds which unfold in these words. In reading the world as the word is being read, teacher and student are, according to Freire, embarked in a productive process of learning. This process must not be

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<sup>55</sup> Freire, 1998.

<sup>56</sup> Freire, 1984: 111.

<sup>57</sup> Freire, 1997: 304.

reduced to the transference of skills from the teacher to the student. On the contrary, it must be understood, according to Freire, as a process of production of knowledge; knowledge of a world that pertains both to the student and the teacher, in their condition of subjects capable of speech and action. Thus, Freire's crucial distinction between skill and knowledge, entails a different understanding of the act of teaching: "to know how to teach is to create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be engaged simply in the game of transferring knowledge."<sup>58</sup>

Freire's focus on the creation of possibilities for production rather than for transmission of knowledge opens up a space for the restoration of the agency of all parties involved in the teaching/learning experience. Once knowledge is located within the intersubjective space created by teacher and student, then the very production of knowledge involves the agency of the student as much as of the teacher. As a consequence the notions of student and teacher recede as the notion of agent gains space. For Freire, this shift of attention from transmission to intersubjective production entails not only a different understanding of knowledge as such, more importantly, it means a different understanding of the relationship between knowledge and the subject. This relationship is the focus of Freire's pedagogy. Unveiling the contingent and historically situated nature of knowledge becomes a prime goal of his pedagogical approach. Further, un-blocking the subject's understanding of her relationship to knowledge follows as a necessary corollary; one attainable by what Freire calls "*conscientização*"<sup>59</sup>, or *the development of critical consciousness*.

Freire's pedagogy makes of the development of critical consciousness its main feature; Ira Shor characterises it as the continuous encouragement towards

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<sup>58</sup> Freire, 1998.

<sup>59</sup> Freire, 1984.

questioning answers rather than answering questions<sup>60</sup>. The process of development of critical consciousness is one centred on posing problems, on problematising everyday life experience by bringing it into communication. The development of critical consciousness, following Freire, necessarily draws from the life context of the participants, as experienced by the participants themselves. As it unfolds in communication, it unavoidably takes place in the language of the interested parties<sup>61</sup>. Literacy, or better said, becoming literate is just a step in the process of development of critical consciousness. As Colin Lankshear concludes, after comparing Freire's pedagogy with the functionalist literacy approaches: "for Freire, the ultimate 'text' to be read and written is the world itself. Learning to read and write words is an important and integral part of coming to 'read' and 'write' -to understand and name- *the world itself*."<sup>62</sup>

Freire's conceptualisation of the learning/teaching experience as a process of "reading the word" *and* of "reading of the world" makes a particularly representative case for Habermas's understanding of social action in terms of communicative action. In the process of education teacher and student acting communicatively not only reach mutual understanding on 'something' in the world, but they also and simultaneously participate in processes of social integration as much as in processes of individuation and socialisation. Understood in terms of communicative actions the multiplicity of processes at stake in the relationship between teacher and student, conceived now as an inextricable dyad, comes to the fore. Let us look at these further.

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<sup>60</sup> Shor, 1993.

<sup>61</sup> This language however, must not be restricted to the spoken language but include other media. The use of images, for example, was something vividly promoted by Freire. His own methodology of 'codifications' was based on pictorial images utilised as prompts for critical discussions (Freire, 1984).

<sup>62</sup> Lankshear, 1993: 110.



Freire conceptualises the basic feature of education, “dialogic action”<sup>63</sup>. By dialogic action Freire understands the intersubjective process of collaboration, problematisation and transformation that student and teacher engage in the cultural practice of education, that is, in the process of development of critical consciousness<sup>64</sup>. Freire aims to give central space to the pedagogical implications of understanding dialogue in intersubjective terms. Dialogic action, according to Freire is enacted by subject-subject relationships. This is a crucial point. A subject-subject relationship generates an intersubjective dimension that is not reducible to the relation between subject and object: “Being that dialogue is an I-you relationship, it is necessarily a relationship between two subjects. Whenever the ‘you’ of this relationship becomes an object, dialogue gets perverted, and education gives place to deformation”<sup>65</sup>. On the contrary, and in line with Habermas’s communication theory, dialogue has to be understood in its own terms, explored within its own characteristics. Key to it is the very notion of reaching understanding. For Habermas, reaching understanding is the inherent telos of human speech; for Freire, understanding “belongs essentially to the process of co-participation ... There is no intelligibility that is not at the same time communication and intercommunication, and that is not grounded in dialogue.”<sup>66</sup>

Reaching mutual understanding, acting communicatively, or acting dialogically appear to execute a complex set of operations at the same time. First, as mentioned above, they displace the locus of attention from the subject(s) to the intersubjective. The individual, while retaining her agency in

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<sup>63</sup> Freire, 1970.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. Freire’s theory of dialogic action is the cornerstone of his “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”. The book puts forward a pedagogy that runs in direct opposition to the “oppressive”, “anti-dialogic” mainstream pedagogies in force in most Latin American countries in the sixties. The “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” has been both praised and condemned for its emphasis in the liberation of the oppressed. It is not the aim of this chapter however to discuss this aspect of Freire’s work. Rather the focus of my analysis is on exploring the space created by revisiting Freire’s pedagogy in the light of Habermas’s social theory.

<sup>65</sup> Freire, 1984: 115.

<sup>66</sup> Freire, 1998: 42.

full, gives place to the collective as the prime point of production of understanding. Taking part in a process of reaching understanding inevitably means taking part in a collective process.

Second, this strong conceptualisation of intersubjectivity affects the way the elementary unit for the comprehending meaning get conceptualised. Meaning appears bound to the interpretative accomplishments of partners in interaction, arising time and time again from the “factory of mutual understanding”. While for Habermas, meaning is internally connected to validity, and consequently to the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding<sup>67</sup>, for Freire meaning of the word is inextricably related to meaning of the world. Understood in intersubjective terms, meaning as such becomes, above all, an accomplishment. With every piece of understanding achieved by partners in interaction, there is a bit of “unity” that gets crystallised; a relationship of stability emerges as part of this accomplishment, binding and bonding the subjects taking part in the process of reaching understanding. Moreover, and probably more importantly, this intersubjectively accomplished stability transcends the interaction from which it emerges and projects itself as a stability which reaches further into the community at large, via the reproduction of the lifeworld.

Finally, to the collective and stabilising features of mutually reached agreement, a third aspect has to be mentioned. Mutual understanding situates this collectively accomplished stability in the culture, solidarities and identities, which provide the participants with very resources for interaction.

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<sup>67</sup> “It can be seen from the very conditions for understanding linguistic expressions that the speech acts that can be formed with their help have a built-in orientation toward a rationally motivated agreement about what is said. To this extent, the orientation toward the possible validity of utterances is part of the pragmatic conditions not just of reaching understanding but, prior to this, of the conditions for linguistic understanding itself. In language, the dimensions of meaning and validity are internally connected” (Habermas, 1998a: 270).

The philosophy of Jürgen Habermas and the pedagogy of Paulo Freire ceaselessly emphasise the transformative force of communication. It is in communication that subjects' identities arise and multiply; that bonds of solidarity develop and get reinforced; that cultural traditions get handed down, moulded and remoulded. Human communication is as inextricably related to production, reproduction and conservation, as it is to change. Freire made of the dialogic action the very instance in which teachers and students (both understood as learners embarking in the same process) open up the possibility for apprehending and shaping their own history, a history consequently understood as a possibility. Habermas painstakingly reconstructed a theory of society based on the very notion of communicative action. Mutual understanding and language appear as elementary building blocks of social order; consequently communicative action and its reflexive form of discourse, are key to both reproduction *and* the transformation of this social order.

For Freire, dialogic action enables participants to realise the potential of appropriating history, of transforming society, of becoming subjects to themselves<sup>68</sup>; in short, dialogic action opens up a situated space for the development of critical consciousness, that is, for problematisation of everyday life<sup>69</sup>. As dialogic actions unfold, language unfolds. This process of "reading the world" feeds itself from the world that is being read. The situated character of dialogic action is an incessant reminder of the unity of lifeworld and meaning in language.

For Habermas, in the bonding and binding force of shared understanding resides the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld<sup>70</sup>. Moreover, discourse as a

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<sup>68</sup> Freire, 1983.

<sup>69</sup> Janmohammed, 1993.

<sup>70</sup> "The appropriation of traditions, the renewal of solidarities, the socialisation of individuals, require the spontaneous hermeneutics of everyday communication and thus the medium of consent formation. An interaction in which one actor treats the other as an object to be influenced ignores this dimension of linguistically created intersubjectivity; by sheer

reflexive form of communicative action, constitutes the prime mechanism for coordination in post-metaphysical societies; that is societies that bear the increasing burden of critically assessing current traditions, norms and socialisation patterns. According to Habermas, as contemporary societies generate more and more demand for reflexivity, discourse arises as a unified problem-solving procedure with the potential to serve this need. Above all, the procedural nature of discourse (and of dialogic action) allows for a generative mechanism that, as it unfolds and expands, bringing in more and more participants, it provides a legitimation ground in a position to allow both for diversity and for unity. While diversity grows and settles in the plurality of forms of life, unity takes the form of a reflexive procedure that enables –but does not guarantee– the very diversity of voices.<sup>71</sup> At the root of these processes however, there inhabits the intersubjective linguistic core of mutual understanding.

Communicative action and dialogic action lay claim to a conceptualisation of language and communication that paves the way for a reflexive understanding of everyday life. It is in communication that subjects get socialised (and simultaneously individuated), solidarities get renewed and cultural traditions re-produced. As Habermas has shown, in every “yes” or “no” taken by a hearer, the “offer” made by the speaker gets rationally accepted or rejected. In this apparently in-transcendental action a microcosms of social order get legitimised or challenged. Freire in turn shows how this moment of unity bears the key to the whole programme of a critical pedagogy. His theory of dialogic action puts together intersubjectivity, understanding and language to build a powerful pedagogical programme

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exertion of reciprocal influences, cultural contents cannot be transmitted, social groups cannot be integrated, growing children cannot be socialised” (Habermas, 1985: 174).

<sup>71</sup> Habermas, 1999, 1998b, 1997b.

that certainly promoted the improvement of literacy rate, but above all, challenged the existing order<sup>72</sup>.

### **3. Towards a critical framework for understanding participatory adolescent sexual health promotion**

In this section I will try to guide the journey through the works of Jürgen Habermas and Paulo Freire towards the direction of the core issue dealt in this thesis: the participatory promotion of the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents. As I hope to have shown, Habermas's understanding of social action in terms of communicative actions opens up a conceptual space where Freire's pedagogy can be more fruitfully located. In particular, a Habermasian reading of Freire provides a better understanding of the implications of Freire's notion of education in terms of dialogic actions of production and creation and not of just transmission.

Seen through the lenses of communicative action the whole enterprise of taking part in learning becomes a co-operative process of creation, transformation and, above all, of achievement; a process enacted by teachers and learners, both understood as active social agents. Above all, it becomes about reflecting *and* about acquiring skills. Habermas's theory suggests an understanding of social action that is poignantly captured by Freire's pedagogy. Collective participation in the learning process becomes an unavoidable condition not just for the development of critical consciousness but also, and probably more importantly, it becomes a necessary condition for shaping external and social reality. It necessitates not just the presence of teacher and student but, above all, the active voice of both participants and a

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<sup>72</sup> Freire and Habermas however, part ways when it comes to conceptualising substantively the horizon of transformation. While for Freire transformation gets equated to revolution and to the liberation of the oppressed (Freire, 1970), for Habermas the direction and content of transformation (or as he calls it, "the dynamic of development") are open-ended, unpredictable ventures which are related to socio-historical circumstances and by no means are guaranteed by the logic of these developments (Habermas, 1987a).

language that is accessible to all partners in interaction. Now we can go back to the main question of the chapter and ask what can participatory adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion learn from these reflections.

The discussion developed in chapter two attempted to unveil key problems lying underneath participatory approaches to adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion. It problematised, separately and in combination, the concepts of adolescence, of adolescent sexual and reproductive health, and of adolescent participation in sexual and reproductive health promotion. Let us revisit these problems briefly.

A first and central contention is the problematic nature of the concept of adolescent. Adolescents appear constructed as in transit to adulthood. This understanding of the adolescent impacts directly on the conceptualisation of their sexual and reproductive health, which, in line with the transit-to-adulthood discourse, are seen as instances for patrolling adolescents into adulthood.

Under the lenses of Freirean pedagogy, the adolescent in sexual health promotion is understood as a social actor, a participant in a co-operative process of learning; the adolescent is certainly not seen as a force to be guided into adulthood. Moreover, any attempt to engage in dialogue with the adolescent that is guided by a conceptualisation of adolescence as a 'biosocial gap' will be in direct opposition to the dialogical quality of Freire's pedagogy. A way of looking at this problem is given by the history of difficulties with attempts to set up participatory approaches to adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion. Invitations to participation, to the exercise of agency and creativity clash with policing imperatives. It has been shown in the previous chapter how adult manipulation of the adolescent is a strategy often applied to resolve this contradiction. This manipulation has many faces and degrees: from an overt pressure to comply, to a subtle management of

adolescent subjectivity. The patrolled adolescent is seen as an object in the eyes of the adult, an object to be treated strategically, to be guided into adulthood. In so proceeding, adolescents' agency is subjected to a myriad of disciplinary practices, power relations, domination games, discriminatory mechanisms, etc. In Freire's terms it is subjected to "anti-dialogic" actions<sup>73</sup>. A first step towards a participatory adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion framework is to conceive of the adolescent as a subject that holds agency, as social actor; as a subject in a position to do and undo.

A second significant issue discussed in chapter two is the problematic conceptualisations of the notions of adolescent sexual and reproductive health. Adolescent reproductive health appears to be circumscribed, not without any conceptual violence, to the language of science, and in particular to the aseptic vocabulary of biology. Moreover, although sexual health seems to enjoy a broader horizon than its close relative, reproductive health, most of its breadth runs against another constricting discourse, that of family life education. Further, by locating sexual and reproductive health knowledge within scientific discourses, and by disconnecting it from the subjects of this knowledge, in our case the adolescents, no substantive bond is made between these two building blocks. As seen in chapter two, there is little evidence of adolescent participation in the elaboration of what falls under categories such as reproductive and sexual health.

The absence of adolescents as social actors in the conceptualisation of issues like reproductive and sexual health, is incompatible with a Freirean approach to participatory pedagogy. In this respect, the conceptualisation of adolescent sexual and reproductive health necessitates the interested parties themselves, that is, the very adolescents. What constitutes adolescent sexual and reproductive health knowledge, what relation this knowledge bears to the subjects of knowledge (i.e. adolescent and adults, now understood as active

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<sup>73</sup> Freire, 1970.

agents), as much as what relation this knowledge and these subjects of knowledge bear to the social and cultural community to which they belong, are all matters to be raised and resolved collectively *with* the interested parties themselves. In other words, far from being an exclusivity of experts, adolescent sexual and reproductive health knowledge becomes an *achievement* that binds and bonds the subjects that re-create it (adolescents as much as adults).

Finally, the third constitutive element is given by the concept of adolescent participation itself. The analysis introduced in the previous chapter illustrated the controversial nature of participatory approaches to adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion. In addition to the problematic understanding of adolescent and adolescent sexual and reproductive health, the concept of participation colludes –in theory as much as in practice– with the concept of the adult gaze. In this respect, and as a consequence to what was discussed in chapter two, participation appeared equated to a process of transmission to which, adolescents are drawn into to comply –to fill up the biosocial gap– rather than to take part.

Following from the elaborations put forward in this chapter, participation entails much more than mere transmission. First, it is understood as a necessarily collective process, in which the notion of collective must not be reduced to an aggregate of individuals but rather, be understood in its own terms. Second, participation is a situated process that is rooted in the everyday life existing in local conditions and, as such, it re-creates local knowledges. Third, participation is fundamentally an argumentative process; that is, it is held together and steered by the interpretative accomplishments of its participants. In short, adolescent participation in the promotion of sexual and reproductive health is conceived here as a collective process of creation, rather than of transmission. More importantly, that which is created in this process by the adolescents (now understood as social agents) must not



get reduced to sexual and reproductive health knowledge. On the contrary, as shown in the discussion of Habermas's concept of communicative action, this process of creation extends to social norms as much as to the socialisation and individuation of participants. But above all, as noted by Habermas, the fundamental achievement of the process of creation in participation is reaching understanding. In conclusion participatory adolescent sexual health promotion will be understood as a collective social process, enacted and performed by social actors (the adolescents, in particular), and directed towards achieving understanding. As such participation not only secures the re-creation of knowledge, but also expands the social integration of the adolescents, and extends their individuation and socialisation. In short, *participation is a social process of creation through which those taking part in it shape knowledge, as much as social relations, as much as themselves.*

So far, I have limited myself to fleshing out the main features of a participatory approach to adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion based on the conceptual architecture of Freire's pedagogy. I have also delved into the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas in order to search for a more comprehensive social theory on which to ground, and better understand Freire's pedagogy. What follows is an excursion into the empirical exploration of the approach outlined. A Freirean-inspired health promotion programme unequivocally demands that the tools of promotion be taken away from the exclusive hands of the health promoters, in particular the language of promotion, the spaces of promotion and the networks of promotion. In line with this perspective, research into this approach to health promotion will demand the sharing of the research enterprise between researcher and participants. The following chapters will attempt to give testimony of exactly this.

# Chapter 4

## Taking Part in the Field

This chapter addresses the methodological provisions generated for the empirical investigation of the conceptual framework put forward in chapter three. It touches on a range of questions, from specific methodological aspects (e.g. the complexities behind the transcription of audio-visual data), to broad methodological concerns (e.g. the reasons behind the choice of a qualitative approach). In the sections that follow I will attempt to address these concerns, ordering the topics scope-wise. I will start by developing a general justification for the methodological strategy with which adolescent participation in sexual health promotion was empirically investigated here. Second, I will introduce the reader to the participatory adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion project that is to be examined in this investigation. Third, I will provide a justification and rationale for the way in which social data was gathered. Finally, I will give an account of the steps taken from the gathering of the data into its arrangement for analysis.

### 1. Participation and adolescent sexual health promotion

The lengthy dialogue between the works of Habermas and Freire discussed in the previous chapter yielded the sketch of a theoretical framework for adolescent sexual health promotion. First, under this framework the adolescent is understood as a subject with agency, a social actor -an active learner, in Freirean terms. Second, the concept of sexual health is understood as knowledge in circulation in the community; as such it is ceaselessly and collectively re-created by the community, an achievement of the community. Finally, participatory promotion of the sexual health of the adolescents is understood as a process of *creation*; one in which, not just the adolescent, but

every participant is considered an active learner. These conceptualisations of adolescence, adolescent sexual health and participatory adolescent sexual health promotion, extensively discussed in chapter two and theoretically re-grounded in chapter three become the focus of empirical scrutiny in this chapter and the three chapters that follow. While this chapter focuses on all relevant aspects of the *research design strategy* followed in this thesis, in particular *research principles* and *data elicitation*, the following three chapters provide the accounts of the rationale for *data analysis*, and the interpretation and discussion of the analysed data.<sup>1</sup>

Exploring empirically a participatory framework for the promotion of adolescent sexual health like the one elaborated here is a challenging, and at the same time, highly appealing enterprise. Doing away with understanding adolescents as a patrolled bio-social gap in transit to adulthood and conceptualising them instead as active learners, brings a new perspective for observing and interpreting adolescents' actions, while posing questions on what novel interpretations, if any, this perspective may yield. Moreover, understanding adolescent sexual health as falling within the streams of knowledge that active members of the community, the adolescents included, re-create and secure by and for themselves, rather than as the exclusive realm of experts, raises curiosity as to what clusters of meaning, what inter-connections, what values, inhabit this apparently intriguing world of adolescent sexual health. Finally, looking at participatory adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion as a process of collective creation rather than as an opportunity for adult manipulation un-blocks the unfolding of an entire universe for collective adolescent creativity, a universe which, if in any respect new, appears as a fascinating matter for exploration.

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<sup>1</sup> I follow the work of Bauer and colleagues (2000) in my use of the notion of *research process*, and its subsequent breakdown into, among others: *design principles*, *data elicitation* and *data analysis*.

Among the many possible strategies for empirically investigating the issues at the centre of this thesis, there is one that invests the whole venture with additional richness. I refer to the possibility of studying the matter as it unfolds 'live', as it takes place within the boundaries of a *participatory adolescent sexual health promotion project*. The research strategy of this thesis has been in fact designed around the study of one case, the observation of an adolescent sexual health promotion project. Let us look in more detail at the reasons underpinning this choice, and at their implications.

My decision to circumscribe this study to the observation of a project of participatory adolescent sexual health promotion was guided by two main reasons: one conceptual and one practical. Conceptually, there seems to be an unexplored gap between the world of practitioners and the world of social researchers in the field of adolescent sexual health promotion. Research within the world of practitioners seems to be mainly oriented towards evaluation of efficacy, towards the assessment of output, leaving unexplored other fundamental issues. With no intention of undermining the importance - and necessity- of evaluation of health promotion interventions, the point to be made here is that issues falling outside the realm of evaluation of projects do not receive the attention they deserve. For example, while it is not difficult to find literature on the evaluation of the efficacy of adolescent sexual health promotion projects<sup>2</sup>, there is very little research literature looking into interventions, focusing on issues such as the assumptions, the working and consequences of particular understandings of adolescence, adolescent sexual health or participation, which guide such interventions. Furthermore, the bulk of the work done looking precisely at these matters is seldom conducted by generating data from 'live' interventions. In short, with the main exception of the world of project evaluation, participatory health promotion projects have been under-examined by social researchers. This thesis is an attempt to address this gap.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, PRB & PC, 1999; UNFPA, 1998b, 1997c

The second reason for choosing to observe a 'live' intervention is of a more practical nature. I had the opportunity to be part of a team that *designed* and *implemented* one such project, and a few words should be said in this respect. Between early 1995 and the end of 1999, I worked in the field of community health with a group of Peruvian health professionals. In 1996, the possibility of setting up an adolescent sexual health promotion project of a participatory nature arose. This possibility crystallised favourably in 1997, and by April of that year the project SaRA (*Salud Reproductiva para Adolescentes* / Reproductive Health for adolescents) began its implementation phase in ten deprived communities in the Andean, Coastal and Jungle regions of Peru.

My participation in project SaRA, provided me with the unique opportunity to contribute to the design and implementation of the project. This fact enabled me to generate an observational field from a vantage position. First, I could fulfil the goal of exploring 'live' the conceptual approach to adolescent sexual health promotion that I intended to investigate. Second, and more importantly, I was in a position to weave into the implementation of SaRA, the necessary methodological arrangements that would enable me to carry out my research, in particular those related to data elicitation and data collection.

To summarise, two reasons guided my decision to base the research design on the study of a 'live' participatory adolescent sexual health promotion project: one was distinctively theoretical, i.e. the conceptual observation of health promotion interventions; and the other was clearly practical, i.e. the possibility of being a central part of one such project.

Next I want to focus on the reasons for limiting my study to one sole case. My interest in looking at participation processes, in particular at adolescents participating in the promotion of their sexual health, could be satisfied by

looking at just one case without the need to explore further. I did not aim to address questions that may require the observation of more than one case; for example, the possibility of comparing the unfolding of participation processes in different environments, or the prospect of inferring general statements via systematic observation of a broad base of cases. Although the investigation of issues such as these is clearly of great appeal, my research interest did not lay within these. Instead, my focus was on attempting to address questions such as: What understandings of taking care of one's sexual health, of promoting sexual health, arise from open adolescent participation? How do these understandings relate to the everyday life environment of the adolescents? How do processes of participation in the elaboration of these understandings impact back on the adolescents taking part? What can be learnt about the processes of participation as such? The observation of one case, as long as the methodological arrangements were viable, appeared to be the most appropriate way to address empirically the questions guiding this study. In addition, I was involved in a participatory adolescent sexual health promotion project. This involvement allowed me sufficient margin of manoeuvre for observing the social phenomena at the centre of empirical scrutiny in this thesis.

In the next section I will provide an account of the adolescent sexual health promotion project at the centre of my investigation, concentrating my attention on the steps taken to *generate the observational field* and to *elicit and gather empirical data*. Next, once the reader gets familiarised with the intervention, I will address the issue of data elicitation. The reduction, analysis and interpretation of the data gathered will be subsequently discussed in chapters five, six and seven.

## 2. SaRA: A participatory adolescent sexual health promotion project

SaRA started in 1996 and, at the time of writing, is still going on. In around four years of uninterrupted work, a vast amount of material and experience has been generated. In this brief section however, I limit my account to the period between 1 April 1996 and 31 March 1999, during which I was closely involved in SaRA's unfolding; it is moreover, the period during which I gathered the empirical material that is utilised in this thesis. Further, the account is restricted to the project features that are necessarily relevant to the understanding of the methodological arrangements that underpin this investigation.<sup>3</sup>

SaRA was implemented in fifteen communities located in highly deprived rural and urban-marginal areas in the Coastal, Andean and Jungle regions of Peru.<sup>4</sup> In each of the communities the project set up networks of adolescents. These networks or *Clubs* (as the adolescents called them) were organised with the facilitation of team of Co-ordinators belonging to SaRA. The Clubs were set up in open encounters jointly arranged by the SaRA team and local community networks by means of public calls, for example, direct talks with adolescents in schools, fliers in local shops, local radio announcements and door-to-door techniques. Most Club creation encounters took place in highly visible places, such as the communities' main square. During these events all potentially interested parties (e.g. the adolescents, their families, local leaders,

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<sup>3</sup> Further information on SaRA can be found at <http://www.sara.org.pe>

<sup>4</sup> The fifteen communities are distributed as follows: eight in the Department of Ayacucho, in the Southern Andes; five in the Department of Junín, in the Centre of Peru; one in the Department of Ica, in the Coastal Region; and one in the Province of Callao, in the Coastal Region. The Ayacucho communities are the rural villages of Cangallo, Huanta, Quinua, Muruncancha and Coracora, and the urban-marginal communities of Carmen Alto, Santa Ana and Artesanos (all located in the fringes of the city of Huamanga). The Junín communities are the rural Andean villages of Concepción, Chupaca and Paccha, the rural Jungle village of San Martín de Pangoa, and the urban-marginal community of La Victoria (on the outskirts of the city of Huancayo). Ica's community is the rural village of El Carmen. Last, Callao's is the urban-marginal community of Gambeta/Santa Rosa.

etc.) were informed about the new initiative and, more importantly, were encouraged to contribute their views and opinions.

Each adolescent network or Club was made up of a core group of approximately twenty-five to fifty-five boys and girls. In addition, there was a periphery of other adolescents taking part in the initiative less regularly. The balance between boys and girls was roughly even throughout the networks, with a slightly higher participation of young women. The age of most of the participants ranged between 10 and 19 years, following loosely WHO's criteria outlined in chapter two.

The Clubs organised and carried out, as part of the initiative, a range of social activities, broadly grouped under informal, information and economic domains. However, these three categories had only an analytic character; in practice there was a great deal of overlap. Briefly, recreational ventures, enacted with the simple aim having a good time, were considered under the banner of *informal activities*. The *information activities* encompassed all types of endeavours in which the adolescents gathered to receive, to produce or to deliver information, mainly on issues of sexual health. Adolescents themselves decided on the character and content of such ventures, while the SaRA Team provided support in obtaining assistance and collaboration from locally available resources (e.g. health professionals) in the organisation of information activities. Last, the *economic activities* encompassed any ventures enacted by the adolescent networks with the goal of becoming self-sustainable.

A fundamental part of SaRA was the use made of *textual and audio-visual material*. All Clubs were given paper and pencil, tape recorders, photo cameras, and access to video cameras, televisions and video-recorders, as means for creating, viewing and editing their audio-visual material. Some of the adolescents also received basic training in the use of audio-visual



equipment; and they, in turn, trained other adolescents in the group. The Clubs were encouraged to use these technologies to generate accounts of their informal, information and economic activities (e.g. a football match, a visit to a health centre or a Salsa party fundraiser). The audio-visual stories produced by the adolescents, usually in the form of documentaries or dramas, were presented in *cross-fertilisation workshops*, in which representatives of all Clubs took part. Presentations were followed by discussions. During the period from 1 April 1997 to 31 March 1999, three cross-fertilisation workshops were carried out; the first one in March 1998 (in the city of Lima), the second in December 1998 (in the city of Huancayo), and the third one in March 1999 (in the city of Ayacucho).

This is, in a nutshell, what was done by SaRA in fifteen Peruvian communities. SaRA offered a unique opportunity as an observational field for the systematic examination of an approach to adolescent sexual health promotion, such as the one put forward in chapter three. It took on the board central assumptions of full adolescent agency, the locally distributed character of sexual health knowledge, and the productive nature of promotion processes. As such it provided the necessary conditions for participatory promotion to unfold and hence be available for systematic scrutiny.

As a health promotion initiative, the project set the goal of improving adolescent sexual health by creating together with local adolescents social spaces for themselves, and by encouraging open adolescent participation. In the opinion of the panel of advisers that reviewed SaRA,

The project certainly provided a useful social space, recreation, and a reproductive health education for the individuals involved. It included some interesting approaches and successfully achieved much of the four purposes. You have also illustrated the potential of addressing young people's needs by using different avenues, supporting the assertion that

embedding SRH [sexual and reproductive health] education within a broader context can be an effective way to address this sensitive topic.<sup>5</sup>

### **3. SaRA: Observing adolescents taking part in the promotion of sexual health**

I hope that a clear picture is emerging of the workings of SaRA as an adolescent sexual health promotion initiative, and of the appeal of SaRA as a province for observing young people participating in the promotion of adolescent sexual health. The next paragraphs provide an account of the methodological steps taken in obtaining the data required for this study.

There is an important issue that needs to be considered prior to the discussion about the decisions taken and the steps accomplished in order to gather, and subsequently analyse, the necessary data for addressing the research questions put forward in the previous section. Here refer specifically to the long-standing debate in the social sciences with respect to the qualitative or quantitative nature of social data. Although it is not the intention here to enter into the depth of this wide-ranging, on-going debate, a couple of points need to be clearly stated. First, I follow the claim that there are “no grounds for accepting that qualitative and quantitative research are either necessarily or indeed actually characterised by dichotomous philosophical assumptions”<sup>6</sup>; rather the reasons behind the choice of method are to be sought elsewhere. Second, I share the view that research design principles (here, the study of a single case –the project SaRA) do not necessarily dictate the choice of

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<sup>5</sup>The passage comes from a letter from the UK’s Department for International Development to the LSE, dated 29.9.1999. The “four purposes” mentioned in the quotation are: (1) reducing adolescent unprotected sexual activity, (2) providing the adolescents with information in line with their needs, (3) encouraging adolescents to adopt a conscious and responsible sexual behaviour, and (4) helping the adolescents and community members to overcome internalised patterns of gender discrimination.

<sup>6</sup> Murphy *et al.*, 1998: 85.

qualitative or quantitative data.<sup>7</sup> Finally, and more importantly, I agree with the view that the choice of qualitative or quantitative methods should depend on the purpose of the research, and on the kind of questions to be addressed.<sup>8</sup>

With these clarifications in mind, and in the light of the kind of research questions that this study has sought to address, qualitative methods were deemed more appropriate. Indeed, my interests in unravelling meanings, shared interpretations, processes, collective sense making, etc. are best served by qualitative tools focused on talk, on spontaneous communication. Having clarified this important aspect of the research methodology, I will now focus on the data gathering and analysis processes.

Two kinds of data were used: first, documents produced by project SaRA and available for research purposes from the SaRA Documentation Archive, those project documents collectively produced by the adolescents; and second, direct video recording of events of project SaRA, project events in which the documents collectively produced by the adolescents were in turn collectively discussed. Let us explore these decisions in detail.

### *Observing dramas and documentaries: The adolescents as film makers*

As described in the section on SaRA, the adolescents were encouraged to generate audio-visual accounts of stories about their lives, and about the social activities carried out as part of the Clubs' lives. For this purpose, the adolescents were provided with tools for writing, photographing, audio recording, and video- recording<sup>9</sup> and editing<sup>10</sup>. Some of them also received basic training on film making techniques, including the basics of camerawork

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<sup>7</sup> Bauer *et al.*, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Hammersley, 1992

<sup>9</sup> For filming in the field, the adolescents were provided with Sony CCD-TRV21 Video8 handycams (NTSC norm). These cameras have pull-out LCD displays that allow on-site simultaneous and deferred viewing of what is being filmed.

<sup>10</sup> For editing the field audio-visual footage the adolescents were provided with Sony KV-21R20C colour TVs (NTSC norm) and Sony SLV-L4 VHS video player/recorders (VCR). They also received all necessary wires to connect handycams, TVs and VCRs.

and film editing. Adolescents were also granted freedom of choice and control on what to film, where to film, who to film, ways of filming, things to say, etc. During the two years of implementation of SaRA that are the focus of this thesis, the adolescents produced a vast number of films, telling a likewise vast number of stories.

The SaRA Team suggested, among other things, the production of documentaries addressing the prompt “tell me about the community you live in”, a challenge that the adolescents eagerly took on. In this respect, VHS copies of twenty stories of community realised by the adolescents were available for research from the SaRA Documentation Archive. These *community documentaries* allowed first hand access to adolescents’ audio-visual accounts of where and how they live. The documentaries constitute superb *informal social data* combining the three media: *text, image and sound*.<sup>11</sup> In the documentaries the adolescents told stories about their communities, focusing on their likes and dislikes, showing popular and hidden corners, interviewing people, each other, etc. In short, they actively weaved meaning about the place they live in, and in particular about the ways in which they relate to their environment. More importantly, the documentaries represent collectively generated stories. They were produced by the adolescents in the Clubs, working among themselves and in co-operation with other members of the community. The documentaries proved a rich source of data for addressing part of my research aims.

A second set of films chosen for empirical analysis was made up by the stories produced by the young people addressing issues related to adolescent sexuality. In this case, the adolescents created *sexuality dramas*. The SaRA Documentation Archive has VHS copies of seventeen such sexuality dramas, which were available for research purposes. Here again, the adolescents became filmmakers, but in contrast to the community stories, the genre

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<sup>11</sup> Bauer *et al.*, 2000.

changed from documentary to drama. This change allowed them to elaborate, with the use of fiction, issues which have a sensitivity that is difficult to address in the 'real' world. As with the documentaries, the adolescents were in charge of the directorship of the film. This meant deciding what story to tell, who the actors would be, how to dress, where to film, what morale the story should have, etc. As with the documentaries, the dramas were collectively created by the adolescents working in the Clubs. The sexuality dramas include stories of friendship, of clandestine abortions, of family relationships, of unintended pregnancies, of street violence, just to mention some of the topics touched by the adolescents. Above all, the dramas, like the documentaries, constitute invaluable *informal social data* combining the three media -*text, image and sound*- with enormous research potential.

Summarising, among the numerous films produced by the adolescents and available for research purposes from the SaRA Documentation Archive, there were twenty community documentaries and seventeen sexuality dramas. I now turn into the second stream of data gathering, that is, recording of the project events in which the dramas and documentaries produced by the adolescents were in turn collectively discussed. Put simply, the video recording of the three cross-fertilisation workshops.

*Observing presentations and discussions: The adolescents as rhetoricians*

As mentioned in the section on SaRA as a health promotion initiative, the project organised and carried out three cross-fertilisation workshops. Adolescents from all SaRA Clubs were invited to participate. The workshops were also attended by the SaRA Team. In the following paragraphs I will describe in detail some features of the SaRA workshops (already sketched in section two of this chapter) in order to convey the value of these events for my research strategy. Among the activities carried out in the workshops two were of vital importance: the presentation and the discussion of the dramas

and documentaries produced by the adolescents. Let us look at these points in more detail.

With respect to the *presentation of dramas and documentaries*, the arrangements were as follows. Taking turns,<sup>12</sup> each Club presented the film (drama or documentary) to an audience made up of adolescents of the other Clubs, adolescents of the 'presenting' Club but not conducting the presentation, and members of the SaRA Team. TV cameras and video-players were made available. The persons presenting were given full control over the format, style and structure of their presentation; remote controls of the video players were made available, and adolescents were invited to pause the film at any time they deemed necessary (e.g. for the inclusion of further commentary). Adolescents made abundant use of the 'pausing resource'. Pauses were opportunities for the adolescents to expand, qualify, interpret, and contradict what was being shown. After each presentation, the presenters invited the audience to ask questions or comment on their material, generating *group discussions*. These discussions included, among other things: further commentary from the adolescents of the presenting Club, and questions and commentary from the audience.

The three workshops were video recorded in full. Particular attention was paid in capturing the two central processes of presentation and group discussion described above. The video records of the three workshops constitute the second leg of raw data, complementing the videos produced by the adolescents. It is important to note the 'creative tension' generated by the two sets of data: on one hand, the actual documentaries and dramas presented; and, on the other hand, the audio-visual records of these presentations and the discussions they elicited. While the first provide a

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<sup>12</sup> The order for presentations was decided at random. A piece of paper bearing the name of one of the Clubs would be picked by a participant, from a bag containing the names of all presenting Clubs. The first Club was picked by an adolescent from the audience, and

gateway to the representational dimension, to the content of the adolescents' understanding of their communities and their sexuality, the latter open the door to gaining insight into the processes of reflection generated through the commentary and debate triggered by the stories shown. Although there is not clear-cut boundary between the notions of content and process (i.e. process issues also arise within the films and content issues are also present in the commentary and debate) it is the very tension between the two kinds of data that allows the exploration of both content and process.

To summarise, the documents collected from the SaRA Documentation Archive (i.e. the 17 dramas and the 20 documentaries), together with the video recording of the three workshops make up the raw data for investigating the research questions at the centre of this thesis. Let us now move on and concentrate on the clean up of this data and the arrangements for data exploration.

#### **4. From data elicitation to arrangements for data exploration**

I started this chapter by providing an account of the reasons why I opted to circumscribe my research design to the study of a single case, a participatory adolescent sexual health promotion initiative (the project SaRA). I then supplied the rationale behind my decision to elicit the data via collection of documents from the SaRA Archive (i.e. the sexuality dramas and community documentaries produced by the adolescents), and recording of the presentation and discussion of these films respectively. In this section I aim to provide an account of the steps from data elicitation to data analysis.

First, a set of documents was selected from the large pool of available audio-visual materials (i.e. the documentaries, dramas and recordings of

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subsequent Clubs were picked by the adolescents of the Club that had finished with their presentation.

workshops). This decision was taken in two steps. First, I was particularly interested in observing an important sequence or process: the film (documentary or drama), the presentation of the film, and the discussion of the film. The analysis of the *film-presentation-discussion sequence*, I assumed, would yield a richer exploration than the analysis of the audio-visual documents abstracted from the context of their utilisation. With this in mind I viewed all available documents in order to ascertain the number of complete and incomplete sequences. Only the complete film-presentation-discussion sequences were considered for analysis.

The next step was to arrange these sequences in meaningful units in preparation for analysis. The sequences were divided into two groups. One group comprised the sequences on the community documentaries, their presentation and discussion; and the second group comprised the sequences on sexuality dramas and their respective presentations and discussions.

Summing up, the *corpus of data*<sup>13</sup> gathered for analysis included six sets of data, as follows: two sets of films produced by the adolescents (i.e. one set of documentary films and one set of drama films), and four sets of audio-visual recordings of the adolescents (i.e. two sets of recordings of adolescents presenting the documentaries and the dramas, and two sets of recordings of the adolescents discussing the documentaries and the dramas).

A further, important question to address with respect to the corpus of data is its size. Two issues were taken into consideration. First, particular attention was paid in order not to make the mistake often made by qualitative researchers of “collect[ing] more interesting material than they can effectively handle”<sup>14</sup> (an error also common among quantitative researchers). In my particular case, the risk of creating “data dungeons” of collected and never

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<sup>13</sup> Bauer and Aarts, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 34.



analysed material was diminished by the fact that there were a finite number of documents in the SaRA Documentation Archive as well as a finite number of events (i.e. three workshops). Second, the ‘optimum’ size of the corpus was determined on the basis of the “law of diminishing returns”,<sup>15</sup> or the realisation that the incorporation of further data did not add meaningful substance to the analysis at stake. On this basis, 24 sequences of film-presentation-discussion were selected, eight for the group of community documentaries and 16 for the group of sexuality dramas).

Summarising, the composition and size of the corpus of data gathered for this study is made up of 24 films, 24 audio-visual records of film presentations and 24 audio-visual records of film discussions. For the purpose of analysis, I divided this data into two thematic groups. A first group, the ‘documentaries’ group, made up of eight sequences of: film, presentation of film, and discussion of film. And a second group, the ‘dramas’ group, made up of 16 sequences of: film, presentation of film, and discussion of film. Table 4.1 below summarises this breakdown.

		DOCUMENT GATHERED				
		FILM	AUDIO-VISUAL RECORDING			
THEMATIC FOCUS	COMMUNITY	$\sum_1^8$ Community Documentary	$\sum_1^8$ Workshop Presentation of Community Documentary	$\sum_1^8$ Workshop Discussion of Community Documentary	8	N. OF SEQUENCES (N=24)
	SEXUALITY	$\sum_1^{16}$ Sexuality Drama	$\sum_1^{16}$ Workshop Presentation of Sexuality Drama	$\sum_1^{16}$ Workshop Discussion of Sexuality Drama	16	
	24 Films		24 A-V Recordings	24 A-V Recordings		
	NUMBER OF DOCUMENTS (N=72)					

**Table 4.1:** Breakdown of data gathered and arrangements for data analysis.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

A *vertical reading* of Table 4.1 provides a summary of the type and total number of documents gathered: 72 pieces of audio-visual material. These are in turn divided into two types, films and audio-visual recordings. There are 24 films (8 documentaries and 16 dramas), and 48 audio-visual recordings (24 recordings of presentations, and 24 recordings of discussions).

On the other hand, a *horizontal reading* of Table 4.1 directs our attention to the way in which the data collected was arranged for analysis. Following this reading, we do not refer to the audio-visual documents individually, but rather to sequences of film, presentation of film, and discussion of film. A total of 24 sequences constitute the universe of analysis. These sequences fall under two *thematic foci*, that is, community issues and sexuality issues. While the former (i.e. community issues) contain 8 sequences, the latter (i.e. sexuality issues) has 16 sequences. Chapter five provides the results of the analysis of the theme community issues; chapter six and seven provide two analyses of the theme sexuality issues.

Lastly, the issue of *transcribing the audio-visual data* needs to be addressed before inviting the reader to proceed to the empirical chapters of the thesis (chapters five, six and seven). In order to analyse and code the data collected, the audio-visual records had to be transcribed. In transcribing audio-visual data, the complexity behind the image is simultaneously translated and simplified,<sup>16</sup> an operation that is not exempted from problems. To begin with, the transcription of images has to take into consideration the fact that although it is possible to put into words what we see on screen, “it is impossible to describe *everything* on the screen”.<sup>17</sup> This demands a sensitive handling of the inevitable changes that come with translating data from a

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<sup>16</sup> Rose, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.: 250 [italics added]

visual medium to the written word. The precautions taken in this respect are described next.

A first aspect to consider is the differentiation made in the literature between formal and informal social data.<sup>18</sup> Briefly speaking, while the former demands specialist knowledge for its production (e.g. competence is needed to master the art of directing movies, or writing newspaper articles, or taking pictures, etc.), the latter is produced following very few explicit rules. This way of dividing social data has implications for the transcription of image into text. Skilled movie makers spend professional time and effort arranging an array of issues such as lighting, the position of the camera, the type of lens, the composition of the frame, and the editing of sequences of frames, just to name a few. Whoever faces the task of transcribing professional visual data has to be aware of this universe of meaning at the mercy of trained directors.

The picture changes considerably for informal visual data, such as the one analysed in this work. Neither the adolescents who produced the films nor the members of the SaRA Team who recorder the workshop presentations and discussions were professional filmmakers. The records produced by them are closer to the notion of 'visual conversation' than to the sophisticated world of cinema. This aspect impacts on the issues to consider at the time of transcribing. The transcription was carried out considering the audio-visual data as informal data, and assuming no explicit use of the rules of the trade. Thus, the transcriptions were limited to simple descriptions of what appeared on screen and verbatim transcription of what was spoken.

## **5. Conclusions**

The chapter aimed to disclose the decisions made and the steps taken for the empirical exploration of participatory adolescent sexual health promotion.

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<sup>18</sup> Bauer *et al.*, 2000.

First, it started by providing an account of how the issues discussed in chapters two and three were organised into a coherent research design, based on the principle of the study of a single case. Second, it explained in detail the steps taken for the elicitation of the necessary social data, i.e. films and audio-visual recordings. Third, it accounted for the movement from the stage of data elicitation to the stage of data analysis. However, this discussion finished with the general arrangements for data analysis. The discussion concerning the methodological steps taken for the specific analysis of each set of data and the results of such analyses are provided in the next three chapters. To conclude, qualitative research demands maximum clarity and transparency from the researchers, a demand that is particularly complex when using audio-visual data. When faced with audio-visual data Diana Rose sensibly proposed that, “rather than aim for an impossible perfection, we need to be very explicit about the techniques we use to select, transcribe and analyse data.”<sup>19</sup> In this chapter every effort was made to honour this goal.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 248.

# Chapter 5

## Our Community

This chapter provides an analysis of a series of investigations of the community produced by the boys and girls belonging to the Clubs, within the framework of the project SaRA. The chapter is divided into two parts: Part I is a methodological note detailing the rationale employed in the analysis and interpretation of the data; and Part II provides the results of the analysis. Although the reader is invited to explore the generation of paths for data analysis described in the methodological note (Part I), the two parts that make this chapter can be considered -and read- independently.

### I. Methodological note

As explained in chapter four,<sup>1</sup> I arranged the data gathered for this thesis into sequences of i) film, ii) presentation of the film and iii) discussion of the film. I collected a total of 24 such sequences. Moreover, I divided these 24 sequences into three groups of eight sequences. These three groups contain sequences addressing a particular theme: community issues, social issues and sexual issues. In this chapter I will deal with the analysis of the group of eight sequences under the theme community issues.

As clarified in chapter four this theme was explored, by the adolescents, via the realisation of *documentaries* on the communities in which they live.<sup>2</sup> These documentaries were later presented and discussed by the adolescents in workshops. Eight sequences of film/documentary, presentation of the film/documentary and discussion of the film/documentary selected from the

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<sup>1</sup> See Table 4.1 in chapter four for a summary of the data collected and its arrangement for analysis.

SaRA Documentation archive<sup>3</sup> constitute the empirical data on which the analysis presented in this chapter is based. For the purpose of analysis, I transcribed the audio-visual records of the eight sequences. The following describes the steps for the analysis of the transcripts of the eight community sequences.

The first step in the analysis of the data was the coding<sup>4</sup> of all the texts, that is, the eight sequences of documentaries, presentations and discussions. A coding scheme was designed, based on three broad categories and *seven codes*,<sup>5</sup> as follows:

## 1. Exploration

### 1.1. Descriptive exploration

### 1.2. Argumentative exploration

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter four, section two, for details.

<sup>3</sup> See chapter four, section three, for details.

<sup>4</sup> Following Rose (2000) I determined the *camera shot* as unit of analysis for the coding of the transcripts of the audio-visual data.

<sup>5</sup> The seven codes were defined as follows:

- *Exploration – description* code: constituted of instances in which the adolescents verbalise an aspect of their community. The participants are limited to a descriptive introduction of the issues.
- *Exploration – argumentation* code: constituted of instances in which the adolescents verbalise an aspect of their community and take a position with respect to it. The participants volunteer their own points of view in the portrayal of the community aspect brought into language.
- *Problematisation – problem posing* code: constituted of instances in which the adolescents verbalise an aspect of their community that they consider to be a problem. The participants contribute their own points of view in the portrayal of problem identified.
- *Problematisation – problem causes* code: constituted of instances in which the adolescents verbalise an aspect of their community that they consider to be the cause of an identified problem. The participants contribute with their own points of view in the portrayal of the causes of the problem identified.
- *Problematisation – problem consequences* code: constituted of instances in which the adolescents verbalise an aspect of their community that they consider to be the consequence of an identified problem. The participants contribute with their own points of view in the portrayal of the consequence of the problem identified.
- *Action – identified* code: constituted of instances in which the adolescents verbalise an action that can or should be carried out by them in the community.
- *Action – accomplished* code: constituted of instances in which the adolescents verbalise an action carried out by them in the community.

2. Problematisation
  - 2.1. Problem posing
  - 2.2. Problem causes
  - 2.3. Problem consequences
3. Action
  - 3.1. Action identified
  - 3.2. Action accomplished

All the data was coded under the coding scheme outlined above. It should be noted that whenever the meaning of the data exceeded the definition of the code, the text was coded under more than one code; in several occasions, text was coded under all seven codes.

Once all this stage was completed, all the coded text in each of the seven codes was printed out together, producing seven code-wise printouts. For example, all the quotations under the code 'argumentative exploration' appeared constituting a 'new text'. In so doing a crucial shift in attention took place; the original text, i.e. the transcripts of documentaries, presentations and discussions gave way to a different *kind* of text, one artificially created by putting together all the instances in which 'argumentative exploration' occurred. This artifice -the transformation of transcripts of sequences into code-wise printouts allowed me to move away from 'individual' stories and to concentrate on particular aspects of these stories, more in line with the conceptual curiosity which brought me in contact with the text.

Code-wise printouts were read and re-read with the goal of fleshing out thematic commonalities. The interest here was to identify patterns in the adolescents' talk about the place they live in. This code-wise reading enabled the simplification of highly complex data. In reading all the quotations in which the adolescents limited themselves to, for example, exploratory descriptions of their community, I was able to tease out commonalities at this

very level without having to worry about other levels of talk, e.g. argumentation or problematisation.

The commonalties identified through the code-wise reading were subsequently explored across all seven codes. These explorations allowed me to understand if, when and how, common issues identified at one level (e.g. descriptive) unfolded at other levels (e.g. problematisation and/or action). This across code exploration yielded five categories or *building blocks* of the community. The issues that appeared to be popular *both* across levels and across Clubs constitute these building blocks. The conceptualisation and exploration of these building blocks is what follows in the next section.

## **II. The community explored**

This section introduces the results of the exploration of the investigations made by the adolescents of their communities. The section is divided into two parts. The first part explores the adolescents' investigations by articulating the building blocks that, in their own eyes, make their communities. These building blocks will be introduced, defined and inspected, paying particular attention to the network of meanings that sprout from them and to the handling of these meanings by the adolescents. The second part elaborates on two 'stories of community' that arose from the abstraction and interpretation of these building blocks.

### **II.1 The building blocks of the community**

Five building blocks have been identified as constituting the basic material that defines the adolescents' communities: people, open spaces, institutions, the economy and traditions. Let us explore each of these in turn.



### II.1.1 The people

The people are a key, salient building block of the community, occupying substantial space in the investigations carried out by the adolescents. This building block has been broken down into two. First, the **people talked about**, that is individuals whose part in the community is examined by the adolescents, but from whom we do not have direct testimonies; in short, people as objects. And second, the **people who talk**: the people from the community who appear as participating subjects in the documentary films.

#### *The people talked about*

Two groups of people talked about were particularly salient: authorities and polluters. The **authorities**, often exemplified by the figure of the mayor, were portrayed as having a complex characterisation. A first defining trait of the authorities was their ability to effect change; they were seen as the fundamental factor triggering action in the community, as a main force behind 'getting things done'. This ability to generate change was noted by the adolescents,

*The camera zooms into a monument inside a tourist centre; both the construction where the monument is located and the monument itself look brand new.*

Marlene (voice over): Now you can see the 'Malecón de los Shapis',<sup>6</sup> which was inaugurated on 30<sup>th</sup> December. This building was made possible by the efforts of the mayor, Mr Eusebio Allaga Alfaro. (ChuD, 9' 20'')<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Malecón de los Shapis" is a tourist complex named after the shapi culture, a culture whose origin lies in the eastern jungle areas of the Junín region, where the village of Chupaca is located.

<sup>7</sup> The text in italics corresponds to my description of what appears on screen. The rest of the text is a verbatim transcription of the spoken words. The notation 'voice over' indicates that the person speaking cannot be seen on screen. The index in brackets reads as follows: the first three letters (i.e. 'Chu') refer to the community that produced the document (in the example, the rural village of Chupaca); the fourth letter (i.e. 'D') refers to the instance in the sequence of film, presentation of the film, and discussion of the film, ('D' for Documentary, 'P' for Presentation, and 'Q' for discussion). The final figure (i.e. 9' 20'') refers to the location of the passage in the original film (i.e. 9 minutes, 20 seconds into the documentary). When passages coming from presentations and discussions are quoted (i.e. 'P' and 'Q' passages), the location is indicated by the letters P or Q followed by a number (e.g. P3 or Q7), which indicates the

Hugo (presenter): in the past, the majority of the population, our neighbours, dumped lots of rubbish into the irrigation ditch, but with the support of the authorities they were able to clear the ditch. {Pausing the video to add commentary on the issue of rubbish in the community} (EICP, P3)<sup>8</sup>

The authorities, erectors of monuments and clearers of ditches, appear as key agents behind the transformation of the community. Be it in the development of open spaces for the public or in the improvement of basic services, change seems to take place through the intervention of the authorities. This ability, this power to effect change apparently held by the authorities is portrayed as a capacity to generate changes that are positive, as well as negative,

*Image of a boy speaking to the camera with some Inca ruins in the background.*

Helio: This is the problem. The authorities don't care and there's no good development in Paccha, to develop this place into a tourist centre. (PacD, 13'30'')

*Close up image of a forty-something woman's face; she is about to be interviewed by one of the adolescents of the Club.*

Hector (voice over): We're now with a neighbour who is going to give us her opinion on the sports ground.

Carla (v/o): Madam, what can you tell us about the sports ground? What's missing?

Hector (v/o): What's lacking?

Neighbour: Well, lots because they have to improve it for the kids to be able to play in it. The mayor has to take care, he promised a sports ground. He even promised a patch of land for our Mother's Club. He also said that kids up to the age of twelve would be entitled to 'Vaso de Leche'.<sup>9</sup> But now he says that he won't give us that. I would like the mayor to fix the sports ground, to improve it, so that kids can come here to play. (LaVD, 9'20'')

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number of the pause in the presentation (i.e. the third pause; for details, see chapter four, section three) or the number of the question in the discussion (i.e. the seventh question).

<sup>8</sup> This passage comes from a presentation of a documentary made by the adolescents of the rural village of El Carmen (this can be inferred from the annotations EICP, 'EIC' -referring to El Carmen- and 'P' -referring to the instance of presentation in the sequence film-presentation-discussion). Hugo is one of the presenters; it is the third time that the showing of the documentary has been paused (that is the reason of the P3 annotation).

The power of the authorities seems to reach very deep. Not only do they possess the ability to make things happen, but they are also seen to have the responsibility to do so. In both the praising of the authorities' 'good' actions and the criticising of 'bad' ones, the focal point with respect to local action lies within the authorities, which appear as the 'natural' agent in the promotion of community change. For better or for worse, community change is portrayed as clearly dependent on the authorities,

*Images of a group of girls from the Club sitting in a square, interviewing each other*

Carina (facing the camera): Chupaca should be an agro-industrial province in order to generate more employment. This is the task of the mayor who has to do the job. The mayor should also be dynamic to make Chupaca progress. (ChuD, 24'09'')

The issues identified as in need of action in the community seem to find an unequivocal pipeline that leads, always, to the authorities. This portrayal conveys an image of overwhelming power. The authorities seem to be in possession of a higher order of agency, which is different from the agency of the ordinary member of the community. Not only do they provide (or fail to provide) support for the solution of problems but more importantly, they appear to be the ones that do, undo and redo the community *itself*. The authorities hold the power to change things, a power apparently alien to the community members. If the authorities decide to bring about change, then there will be change; otherwise there will be not.

This picture of the power held by the authorities, combined with an image of bleak community agency, seems to yield mixed feelings in the adolescents. As ordinary community members they appear to feel at the mercy of the authorities' omnipresent discretion, and the imbalance of this relationship does not go un-noticed. Their reactions to it appear colourfully and boldly illustrated in their investigations. Let us explore them in more detail.

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<sup>9</sup> Vaso de Leche is a national food programme for low income families.

*Still image of a large greyish cement construction, in a vast cement open space. As the words begin, the camera pans to both sides of the construction.*

Giovanna (voice over): We're seeing San Martin de Pangoa's park, which was changed by the former mayor. As you can see, we now have no coconut trees, which used to give us the shade that was needed for people to come here for a stroll or a rest in the afternoons. Now we can see that the sun is much too hot. (PanD, 0'30'')

The 'new' park of San Martin de Pangoa is identified as the work of the mayor, and it is he that is singled out as the mentor and executor of this development. While the images on screen show what the new park looks like, the voice over tells us about how the park used to be. The mayor changed it from tree-lined and shady to cement. One is left with the impression that the mayor has forgotten about the importance of shade in a hot community, an importance that he would appreciate only if he used the park. The mayor seems to have lost touch with the population, who enjoy an afternoon stroll in the park. The population, together with the audience, witnesses the burning sun. The changes brought about by the mayor to the community's park appear to be an issue of importance, and the decision to change the park is subjected to sharp problematisation by the adolescents,

Nelson (presenter): In the past the park was better because it had trees, coconut trees.

Luisa (presenter): There were trees, for the people to ... but now, they've changed it, there're no more trees, they've planted flowers instead, but there're no more trees.

Nelson (presenter): The good thing is that he built an auditorium and that the park is more modern; but it's not what the community wants. {Pausing the video to comment on over a minute of footage on the 'new' park} (PanP, P1)

Taking turns, the boy and girl in charge of the presentation, proceed to problematise the mayor's work, lamenting the removal of the shade-giving coconut trees. There seems to be a somehow resigned acceptance of the mayor's measures; an acceptance conveyed by the appealing 'modernity' of

the new park, even if it is not welcome by the community. The negative perception of the exchange of modernity and flowers for coconut trees and shade certainly tells us plenty about the likes and dislikes of Pangoa's community members, but more importantly, it helps to understand the terms of the relationship between the authorities and the community. As we have seen, these terms seem to be marked by a vast separation between one and the other. The authorities do and undo, the community just witnesses with frustration, a frustration that emanates in the adolescents' accounts.

The authorities seem to do and re-do the community in a way that at times does not reflect the community's wants, generating a feeling of frustration. Reactions of frustration however, appear to be just one way in which the detachment between authorities and the community is experienced. Coexisting with this feeling, there is another harsher way of reacting to the authority: not just expressions of frustration but acts of denunciation. Expressions of frustration and acts of denunciation sprout from the same issue, the feeling of detachment from the authorities combined with actions by the latter that do not reflect the community's expectations. However, frustration and denunciation must be understood in their own terms. First, acts of denunciation carry within expressions of frustration but not vice-versa. Second, expressions of frustration, like the one illustrated by the example of San Martín de Pangoa's park, seem to imply the existence, among the frustrated people, of a residue of trust in the authorities, a sense of remote hope. Acts of denunciation on the other hand, appear to collapse any point of contact between authority and community, a sense of total break,

*Image of two Club boys, from the waist up; one with a microphone pinned to his t-shirt, being interviewed by the second.*

Valdo: What is it that you dislike the most in your community?

Oscar: The people that I dislike the most are the authorities because they don't support us and they charge excessively for the water, and, as you can see, today is a working day and the authorities do not fulfil their duties. Look, this is the office of the [relevant authorities] and there's no one there. (*The camera points at a closed door that appears in the background, then back to boy*).

However, they charge us excessive for the water and they don't even provide it during the hours that they should. As you can see, these are the authorities that we've got. (CalD, 3')

Malú: As we can see, they promised to landscape a park; the mayor, he'd say anything in order to get votes. He promised it but nothing was done. Even more, the land is there for chickens to feed or sheep to graze.

Jorge: Even pigs.

Malú: It looks like as farm (big laugh, some applause). {Pausing the video to add commentary on footage illustrating the bad conditions of an open patch of land that was supposed to become the community's park} (LaVP, P2)

Frustration and denunciation emerge as the two main ways through which the adolescents respond to the downside of the problematic relationship between the authorities and the community. The adolescents, as illustrated above, see the authorities in possession of a wealth of power that enables them to intervene on the community without consideration of the community's interests. Authorities actions transform the community, at times for the better, at times for the worse. The community, whose role appears limited to that of witnessing these transformations, seems to welcome the good change and criticise the bad. Expressions of frustration and acts of denunciation are the forms of embodiment of this criticism.

Next we move on to explore the second group of people talked about by the adolescents. This group, composed of ordinary members of the community, can be labelled as **the polluters**. The polluters are also a very complex category. They are named by the adolescents in a variety of ways: the people, the neighbours, the populace, etc. The polluters are the ones who dump the rubbish that is found scattered, almost everywhere, around the community,

*Shots of a river and of some young boys and girls from a Club*

Juliana (voice over): The main problem is that the people dump rubbish in the river, damaging the landscape and harming the ecology and our health. (CalD, 9')

Malú (presenter): As we can see, all the neighbours...

Jorge (presenter): (*interrupting what Malú is saying*) dump their rubbish...

Malú: (*interrupting what Jorge is saying*) ...they dump the rubbish in the park, and the rubbish collector comes only once a week...

Jorge: It accumulates, smelling horrible

Malú: They dump it all over the parks and it causes diseases... flies... like in every place, there's always rubbish. {Pausing the video to comment on over more than minute of footage on the state of deterioration of the open spaces of the community} (LaVP, P1)

The polluters, we learn from the image and the commentary, dump rubbish in the river and, as the last illustration puts it, "all over the parks". Their actions are seen as very damaging; polluters make the community an ugly place to be in. The rubbish they scatter everywhere ruins the environment, attracts flies, damages health, etc. The emerging 'polluter-pollution' pair is a significant one, worthy of exploration. The polluters are those who dump the rubbish in the community, in turn rubbish seem to be a widespread phenomenon very negatively viewed by all the adolescents. The issue of rubbish is inexorably linked to the issue of those who dump the rubbish, i.e. the polluters. But although this link is made in nearly every documentary, the understanding of the link shows interesting discrepancies, evincing like-wise interesting narratives of the phenomenon of rubbish.

One way of unravelling the dyad polluter-pollution is by looking at the ways in which the polluter is portrayed. Here, the polluters seem to be seen as belonging to two distinct types. Under a first reading, polluters are seen as the ones that 'physically' cause the phenomenon of rubbish; someone must have dumped the rubbish for it to be scattered around, this someone is the polluter. However, although it is the community people that dump the rubbish, the roots of the phenomenon appear to lie elsewhere,

*Images of an irrigation ditch, the water is flowing.*

Milagros (voice over): Here we are, by the irrigation ditch of the district of El Carmen, where people are accustomed to dump the rubbish because there is no lorry that comes to collect it. I think that this is wrong because the authorities should agree with the

people and do something about it so that the ditch does not get filled up with rubbish, creating pollution. (EICD, 12'35'')

A second reading of the issue sees the polluters not only as the ones who physically dump the rubbish, but more importantly, as the ones responsible for it; the instrumental action of dumping rubbish gets invested with a layer of morally reprehensible intentionality. Here the focus of attention changes: while the former reading places the emphasis on the pollution, the latter places it on the polluter.

*Heavily zoomed shot of someone unloading a bucket of rubbish into the river. The person notices that he's being filmed at pulls a bad gesture to the camera as the voice over goes on.*

Angeles (voice over): Like this person, there are lots of people that dump the rubbish in the river, and in this way they pollute the environment. (ChuD, 4'35'')

The dyad polluter-pollution seems to be explained by different circuits of causes and consequences, of abilities and responsibilities. In the first passage, the polluters appear broken down into two. The people actually dumping the rubbish seem to be immediate -though innocent- polluters; the true polluters, the ones that must be denounced, Milagros seems to be telling us, are the much discussed figure of the authorities. For Angeles on the other hand, the responsibility for the community's pollution falls clearly on the people dumping rubbish around. The talk about pollution is accompanied by strong images of the polluter, in clear contrast with the previous passage in which the issue of pollution was talked about over images of the rubbish and not of the people. In the second passage the issue of pollution gets embodied in the person of the polluter, who carries the weight of the denunciation.

To summarise, this building block of the people talked about focused on two significant figures in the community: the authorities and the polluters. The actions of both groups of individuals appeared, for better or for worse, to shape the communities the adolescents live in. The audio-visual



representation of authorities and polluters, the comments made about them, the ways in which they fall under the problematising attitude of the adolescents who investigated them, all tell us about the significance they have in the community. With respect to the authorities, the adolescents seemed to tell us that these are people in positions of overwhelming power that are far removed from the ordinary members of the community. The ways of relating to this phenomenon appear to be two: expressions of frustration and acts of denunciation. Regarding the polluters, we learn that the issue of pollution is problematic in all communities and that it too provokes expressions of frustration and acts of denunciation. Interestingly, while for some the targets of denunciation continue to be the authorities, for others the polluters themselves are the ones to carry the blame.

#### *The people who talk*

A central method employed by the adolescents for investigating their communities was to interview people. People feature extensively in the documentaries; it is people who make up the community and so their testimonies are paramount in putting together a portrait of the community. Unravelling this particular building block proves challenging and exciting. On one hand, the adolescents' investigations have the community as the object of inquiry; but on the other hand, the people appear in the documentaries as subjects with agency, as 'talking beings'. As such, these interviews are crucial, as they portray the community as a complex jigsaw puzzle made up of voice of the adolescents, as well as the voices of ordinary people in the community. These people's explorations are in turn explored by the adolescents, whose explorations are in turn explored here. The interplay between the various levels of account and interpretation provides us with priceless richness. People are invited to talk and provide their points of view with respect to the community they live in. The adolescents in turn, show these testimonies as building blocks of their communities; they comment extensively on what is said, contextualising it, interpreting it,

problematizing it, re-inventing it. This section explores these webs of interpretations, unravelling the value of this very special building block of the community: the people invited to talk.

The intervention of 'talking people' in the documentaries can be categorised under two broad clusters of roles: people talking as ordinary community members and people talking in their 'economic' roles, that is, as traders, fishmongers, etc. Here I will explore only the first of these clusters, leaving the investigation of the latter to the section on the building block, The Economy (see below).

Ordinary **community members** are called into the documentary to give their testimonies, to voice their views, to put forward issues, to illustrate, to challenge, to support; in short, they appear in the uniquely human role of story teller. Speaking people telling stories provide a vast resource to explore and attempt to understand the community, making this a privileged building block. Looking carefully into the workings of this building block, two different ways of operation of the 'speaking people' can be identified.

At a first level, community members feature as providers of information about something 'out there'. Although their account is necessarily limited to their subjective experience, issues under thematisation in the story told by them belong to the community as a whole. This level sees community members interviewed on issues that are under inquiry by the adolescents, their opinions help the adolescents in their investigative endeavour,

*Close up of a man's face in his late thirties.*

Luis (voice over): We're trying to gather some information on this park. There's someone who can help us. Excuse me, what's your opinion about the park? What do you think about what was supposed to be built here?

Neighbour: Well, as neighbour in this district I see plenty of neglect on the part of the municipality. They haven't yet carried out works that they'd promised, not even those for the kids, for them to come and play their favourite sports (*camera 'scrolls'*

*right and pans over the 'no-park' and back to the speaking man).* I'd like to see the mayor and the municipality doing their job.  
Luis (voice over): Thank you. That's all. (LaVD, 2'45'')

The adolescents set out to investigate the issue of a park that was promised by the authorities but was never delivered. In support of this venture they interviewed a local resident, an ordinary member of the community, and through his account we find out that this issue is part of a broader problem concerning widespread neglect in the community. As already seen above, in the section on the people talked about, the authorities are denounced for the 'missing' park, an attitude that is corroborated by the vivid account of a local man on camera.

The appearance of ordinary community members giving their own accounts proves a powerful way of presenting and understanding issues that are important for the local population,

*A man in his twenties is shown walking forward toward the camera.*

Huber (voice over): Now we're going to interview a young person from the district of El Carmen, on his opinions on the youth in this town.

*Huber moves on shot; he has a microphone in his hand.*

Huber: Hi there. We'd like to ask you, what is your opinion on the youth of El Carmen?

Young man: My opinion? The youth here are studious and hard working; they're fun, quite cheerful and polite. Here in El Carmen there's lots of unemployment, not many jobs, maybe because it's small. Well, there are farms. No one wants to work in the farms; everyone wants to study.

Huber: What would you say to the young people here? What's your advice to them?

Young man: Well, the best thing they can do is to study. There are lots of people here that after school they just stagnate. They go out with the boyfriend and then (*he gestures a pregnant bulge*) they get pregnant. You know, here in El Carmen you see this type of thing [...]

Huber: Thank you. This was the opinion of a young man from El Carmen. (ElCD, 7'44'')

Here the topic under investigation is youth altogether. The young man gives his point of view, providing a diagnosis and advice to the local youth. The investigative strategy seems to yield good results, allowing the adolescents to portray a picture of community members' image of the youth. Again, the person drawn into the documentary is asked for an opinion on an issue that pertains to the community. The focus, the theme of the conversation is an aspect of the community.

A second level of participation of ordinary community members is somewhat more complex. Here, the object of inquiry is encapsulated to a large extent in the people who are actually talking. What the adolescents want to look at lies within the person that is being interviewed; talking to them becomes not just a way of broadening and strengthening the investigation but, more essentially, the interview comprises the core of the inquiry. It is about knowing someone rather than knowing something,

*A Club boy [Oscar] is sitting on a chair. To his side there's a 'transvestite, and standing behind him there's another man. On the other side there is another Club boy [Valdo], tape recording the interview.*

[...]

Oscar: What's your opinion on people that are... that they call homophobic?

Tamisha: They are people who probably didn't get affection when they were growing up, and when they see us so cheerful, so friendly, they get angry. I imagine that the problem might be with their lives, I don't think it's anything else.

Oscar: Do you go to the health centre?

Tamisha: Yes

Oscar: And how do doctors treat you? Do they treat you well or do they try to...

Tamisha: No, no, when a homosexual arrives to the centre, they treat you much better; they even give us thing for free.

Oscar: I know that there's advice on reproductive health...

Tamisha: On AIDS, on venereal diseases. Yesterday for example I picked up my Elisa Test results. I go for checks every three to six months.

Oscar: So, things are cool in the post.

Tamisha: Oh yeah. They tell me, bring the other 'girls', bring them over. They give me free condoms.

Oscar: And when you go to parties; are things OK?

Tamisha: Yeah, normal. We go dancing too. [...] (CalD, 18'50'')

This passage comes from an interview with, what was described as, “a very special and colourful character in the community, a transvestite”. The interviewee tells a story about life in the community to which the adolescents do not have alternative access. It could be said that to an extent, the interviewee *is* the story that is shared with the audience. Her intervention acquires a degree of significance absent in the two passages discussed above. The way the community looks like from the perspective of transvestites belongs to the very experience of the transvestites themselves, and certainly not to the adolescents conducting the investigation. The special value of this account is that it brings into light corners of the community that are hidden from the adolescents; corners that, although apparently invisible, belong to the very horizon of experience of the adolescents,

*An adolescent woman is being interviewed in the town square, in the darkness.*

Huber (voice over): Virginia... We're going to ask this woman<sup>10</sup> a few questions. Virginia, as a 'woman', what is your opinion of adolescent mothers?

*Sounds of laughter coming from the group of young men and women from the Club that are present in the square.*

Virginia: What do you mean?

Huber (v/o): Well, adolescent mothers.

Virginia: Well, excuse me but I disagree. You want to know why? First, you ruin your future. Second, if you want to have sex, then you can have sex with a condom. There are lots of young women there with their boyfriends and what happens? Straight away they go and have sex. It's no good this way.

Marta (v/o): Fuck, she couldn't put it clearer!

Virginia: The first thing that happens is that they get pregnant. Then, they bite their nails wondering: should I keep it, should I not? If they keep it they suffer hunger and misery and fuck it, you don't bring a child to the world for it to suffer hunger. Better to have sex using a condom. Bye. (ElCD, 16'44'')

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<sup>10</sup> The word woman here is used to make explicit the fact the interviewee is a mother.

The adolescent 'woman' speaking, herself a member of the Club running the investigation, tells a story about motherhood relating her own experience as a mother. Here the interplay between account and interpretation takes yet another turn. The main theme in this story, a story told by an interviewee, clearly belongs to the speaking individual herself, as was the case with the transvestite. And the interpretation, which until now had resided within the adolescent film-makers, blends into the account, as the interviewee is part of the adolescent group. The boundary between account and interpretation seems to give in; interpretation and account appear to contain each other. Here, probably better than anywhere else, the people who talk show themselves as building blocks of the community.

As a brief summary, this building block on 'the people who talk' enriches our understanding of fundamental aspects of the community, as seen by the adolescents. In contributing to the adolescents' explorations, and at times becoming the focal point of these explorations, the people who talk, who express their opinions, recount their experiences and make their voices heard, engage and contribute to the venture of making sense of the place in which they, as much as the adolescents, live.

### **II.1.2 Open spaces**

The second building block to be examined has been named open spaces. These are places where access is granted to any member of the community. Open spaces were dedicated a great deal of attention by the adolescents in their investigations. They seem to act in one way or another as 'thermometers' of the community. For example, what can and cannot be done in open spaces, how clean or dirty these are, how safe they are, how much attention and care do authorities dedicate to them, all become revealing indicators of the community in general. However, open spaces may or may not be public spaces. For example, at times the adolescents talk about their school as an open space: a place where they go to play sports or do other things. It would

not be correct however, to understand the school as a public space, although it does function as an open space.<sup>11</sup> The school is just one example of what can be termed as an open space. Other open spaces commonly featured in the investigations are the park, the streets and the market. Let us have a look at them.

Open spaces feature extensively in the documentaries, and adolescents' portrayal of them reveals a great deal about their experience of the community. As we shall see, the significance of open spaces spreads over a variety of key aspects, from functionality to aesthetics, from responsibility to distinctiveness.

*The camera catches a group of boys and girls of the Club sitting in the main square, chatting. It then moves towards the street and shows an open door facing the main square, which looks like a corner shop; someone passes by on a skateboard. Camera goes back to the boys and girls in the park; they are toasting with bottles of soft drink. (PacD, 17'30'')*

*Image of a group of kids from the Club; they are all standing in the street, with their arms around each other, in a friendly stance.*

Juliana (voice over): The participants in our Club are going to show you our community, where 70% of the people are immigrants from the Andean regions. (CalD, 0'30'')

*Images of a playground and boys playing football. At the background you can see buildings of what looks like a school.*

Ernesto (voice over): The school, where the majority of the group in our Club goes. (PanD, 13'45'')

The examples show three instances of open spaces: a park, a street and a school playground, respectively. In all of them the adolescents appear having a good time, enjoying themselves. Open spaces are shown in the documentaries as places where you just go to meet up with friends, have a rest, play or go for a stroll. They are portrayed concentrating a great deal of social life, from casual encounters to local celebrations. However, this functional, almost taken for granted aspect of open spaces, represents just one

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<sup>11</sup> The school appears in two building blocks: as an open space and as an institution.

rather simple side of the adolescents' explorations. The significance of open spaces goes well beyond its functional character,

*An image of a park is shown taken from a corner on the opposite side of the street. There are people in the park walking, sitting on the cement benches, chatting, etc. There are also a few trees and some bicycles parked on the side of the road. The camera zooms into the park, with a voice over commentary.*

Marlene (voice over): This park has natural trees, which help to produce oxygen and purify our city.

*The camera starts panning right to left, showing an ice-cream vendor sitting on the sidewalk by his bicycle, and more people sitting on cement benches. It then begins a deep zoom in and catches a green patch.*

Marlene (v/o): Over there we can see small green patches and the respective garbage bins so that people don't dirty this beautiful park too much.

*Camera stops on a group of women sitting on the cement benches.*

Marlene (v/o): Some people are having a rest after walking many kilometres.

*The camera now has changed position and it is now located inside the park, focusing on a signpost on a green patch that reads 'Help us take care of the park'.*

Marlene (v/o): Here we can see one of the messages that give us a guideline to help take care of our park ... and of the green spaces. (ChuD, 22'30'')

Chupaca's park, an open space par excellence, is portrayed above all, as a marker of the community. It condenses within its perimeter significant splendour as well as important concerns. The "beautiful park" welcomes the community's people. It also contributes to the community's environment. This aspect in turn, places demands on the people that make use of the park. The park gives and takes, it provides shelter and requests an exercise of responsibility in return. If this exchange is successful, the community benefits; and at the centre of this exchange, as a key part in the system, is the park: with its trees, its people and its signposts. The centrality of the park is a theme that pervades the adolescents' portrayal of their communities,

*Images of a church; the camera zooms in towards a cross on cupola, and then it zooms out until it displays the building in full.*

Hugo (voice over): Now we're in El Carmen's main park; from the centre we can see the church Nuestra Señora de El Carmen



where every year there are celebrations to honour El Carmen's holy virgin. Dancers and tourists come to celebrate this religious festivity.

*Camera zooms into a building next to the main square*

Hugo (v/o): To the left we have the police station of El Carmen, where the majority of people come to...

*Camera scrolls and zooms into another building facing the square, with a sign on the front reading, 'Municipal District of El Carmen'*

Hugo (v/o): On the left we have the municipality of El Carmen.

*Images of the main square; there are people gardening on it, people walking by, a worker walks by on his way from the fields with fumigation equipment.*

Hugo (v/o): On the other side we have the local government of El Carmen. (ElCD, 3'05'')

In this passage, the centrality of the park appears illustrated in a highly significant fashion. The camera, located *in* the park, proceeds to show the community as it is seen from the park. The church, the police station, public offices, etc. appear situated with reference to the park, i.e. "on this side", "to the left", "from the centre", etc. The park appears as the natural centre of the community, and the community, in turn, gets plotted within the axes of the park.

The importance and value attached to open spaces and in particular to the park can also be gauged by looking at the stories told in communities where there is no park. The very lack of park and the implications of not having one generate a variety of concerns. For example, not having a park in the community means that there's no place where children can have fun (LaVD, 2'05'') or play their favourite sport (LaVD, 2'45''). For grown ups the consequences are less obvious, but nevertheless highly significant for the adolescents,

*Still shot of [the school's back] wall. The camera is by the wall pointing in a direction parallel to it. Behind the wall there are half-built houses. On this side of the wall there's bare land, littered with rubbish. Two young people walk by. Along the 'parallel' wall, almost unrecognisable, there's a 'protruding bulk'.*

Hector (voice over): ...The problem is that we've got no park.

Carla (v/o) (laughing): As you can see, these are the consequences of not having a park.

Hector (v/o): Couples meet, lots of couples ...

*The camera zooms very deeply and focuses on the protruding bulk; it is a couple of youngsters. A young man is leaning over a young woman; she looks mildly uncomfortable. The couple kisses.*

Group (v/o) (shouting): whoa ... yeah...

*She pushes him away. He comes back; they pull and push.*

Anabella (v/o): This is the lack of park

Marisella (v/o): The mayor should respond for this

Carla (v/o): It's not fair that we've got to go through this.

Group (v/o): Snog!! Snog!! (LaVD, 4')

The absence of a park drives the kissing adolescents to alternative, less palatable corners. Although the school field does provide them with an open space to go and kiss, the park is blatantly missing and deeply missed; and the responsibility and blame for the lack of park in the community is ascribed to the authorities. Another trait of open spaces that captured the adolescents' attention is the almost permanent state of dirt in which they exist. As seen in the section on the people talked about, rubbish features highly as a negative aspect contributing to the ugly side of the community. Open spaces are central victims of this phenomenon; rubbish reaches everywhere, including the park, the streets and the school. And a further key problem concerning the open spaces is that of violence and the phenomenon of *pandillaje* or gangs.

*Images -heavily zoomed- of a crowd of over fifty people; they're by a busy main road.*

Juliana (voice over): One of the problems in the community is that of *pandillaje*. Here we can see a clash between two gangs, "Los Lobos" (The Wolves) from the Gambeta district and "Los Destroctores" (The Destroyers) from the Santa Rosa district. It is daytime. There's a person injured. Usually people die in clashes and private property gets damaged. People have to seek refuge in their home because the police do not turn up. (CalD, 26'20'')

Summing up, we have seen some positive and negative aspects of open spaces, such as parks, streets and schools, in the adolescents' portrayal of places they have or would like to have in their communities. As mentioned earlier, open spaces act as thermometers of the community; they appear at the

centre of the community's life, and the way in which they are explored spans a wide range of themes. At times open spaces are portrayed simply as places to go to wind down, and their absence is particularly lamented. Further their value can move from mere functionality to a symbol of the beauty and the degree of sophistication of the community in general. On the other hand, open spaces act as a paradigmatic stage where the community's problems are enacted; dirt, neglect and violence are good examples. Open spaces seem to capture the attention of the adolescents who dedicate time and effort in portraying and problematising them audio-visually. Open spaces reflect the community at large in a salient way, stressing its achievements as much as its problems.

### **II.1.3 Institutions**

For the generation and examination of this building block of the community I use the term institution in its narrow sense, signifying any organisation, establishment or corporation founded for a specific purpose. Understood in this sense, institutions feature in all of the adolescents' investigations and are a topic that provokes controversy, captures their critical eye and incites them to take part and sides in relation to them. The number of institutions shown and talked about in the documentaries is vast and comprises the school, the government offices, the health centre, the market, the 'soup kitchen', the phone box shop, the courts, etc. Among these institutions, one was dedicated a particularly high degree of time and attention: the school. Similar to the other institutions referred to in the investigations, the school appears looked at and problematised not only as an institution as such but also in relation to the larger community. In contrast to some of the other institutions singled out in the documentaries, the adolescents' familiarity with the school enabled them to explore it more in depth, allowing a unique degree of richness. For this reasons, I have selected adolescents' investigations on the school as the one example through which to analyse the building block Institutions.

The **school** is a particularly important aspect to look at due to its special significance in the life of the adolescents. Most of the adolescents that took part in these documentaries go or have been to school, and hence are familiar with the workings of it. This familiarity provides the boys and girls with first hand experience to examine not just the school as such but more importantly, to put the school into a broader social context. This means looking into, among other issues, the part the school plays in the community, the connections that can be identified between school and community, and the terms of the relationship between the school and other community actors. In short, investigating the school means exploring the life of an institution inextricably tied to the community.

A first salient aspect of the adolescents' talk about the school is given by the very 'physical' tone of its presentation. In introducing the school, most of their effort is of a descriptive nature, image and sound are mainly spent in the portrayal of the school building, its rooms and facilities, its layout and architecture,

*Panning over the outside of a building [a school]. You can see a short wall and a metal fence; and behind it a string of rooms.*

Hugo (voice over): On the right we have the school of my community. This is where the majority of the young people come to study. (ElCD, 0'11'')

*Shot from above pointing toward a five storey brand-new-looking building.*

Marlene (voice over): We can see the private school "La Esperanza". It is a well-resourced school; it has fields. This school is well known in Chupaca. (ChuD 10'25'')

*Images of a bare sports ground. The camera begins panning on the right of the sports ground and shows buildings, one of which has a sign on the front, reading 'Juventud rumbo al 2000' [The Youth in Route to Year 2000]; the panning continues over more school buildings.*

Pablo (voice over): As we can see, these are the pavilions of Cangallo's first school; here you do physical education, primary school and initial school. (CanD, 2'40'')

The illustrations show a strong association of the school with the school building; little commentary is dedicated to other aspects of the school. There seems to be no connection between the school and, for example, going to school, or going to school to learn. On the contrary, the talk about the school seems to convey a sense of dryness and detachment. When expanded, commentary on the physical images of the school takes a factual, tiresome turn,

Manuel (presenter): 'Santa Rosa' school has approximately 280 students. Some leave during the year, they either leave the village or dropout for economic reasons. The school has morning and evening courses. In the evening the school is mixed, in the mornings it is just for girls. 'María Prado' school instead has 295 students; it has courses in the mornings, afternoons and evenings. In the evening however, it's only for primary school. {Pausing the video to comment on about two minutes of footage on the local schools} (CanP, P2)

The amount of information provided in this commentary gives indications that some research might have been done by the adolescents in preparation of the presentation of their documentary. However, the information given to the audience seems to be foreign to the life experience of the boy presenting it, as if the school had little to do with him or his peers. The school incites little excitement in the boys and girls, who limit their comments to factual information. The absence of positive talk about the school, however, must not be mistaken as an absence of commentary altogether. The adolescents' investigations do dedicate time and effort in casting a critical eye on the school, in particular its state of decay and neglect,

Malú (presenter): As you've just seen, in La Victoria we've only got one school. It was built very badly, with dried mud; and as you've seen the lavatories are in an awful state, badly painted and very dirty.

Jorge (presenter): the doors are...

Malú: (interrupting Jorge) even the classrooms, when it rains it leaks everywhere. It's quite bad, quite bad. We'll try to do something about it. {Pausing the video to comment on two minutes of footage on the local school} (LaVP, P3)

The problematisation of the state of the school shows a change in the tone of the commentary. The footage of the school, made from inside the building, gives the viewer the possibility of close scrutiny of its actual condition. Moreover, the commentary provided by the adolescents helps to make a picture of the overall situation. The criticism levied against the school connects in a bold fashion, the relationship between the physical side and the experience of schooling,

*Images from inside a classroom: benches, blackboard, etc. The camera shows the ceiling, which is in very bad shape.*

Hector (voice over): The classroom is in a horrible condition. As we can see, the blackboard is damaged. Classrooms here are in a terrible state, the ceiling, for example. This classroom is turning into an inhospitable place. We can see that we cannot study in these conditions. Hey guys, help me! Talk!

Carla (voice over): Who can study in this place?!? What do students do here?!? (LaVD, 5'54'')

The critical eye with which the school gets problematised tells us about the bad state in which the institution finds itself and more importantly about the relationship between the rundown school and the experience of studying in it. The talk about the school has moved by now, from physical descriptions of buildings and listings of local statistics to a sharp account of the pains of studying in rundown schools. A neglected school generates a feeling of frustration and indignation. It also provokes colourful manifestations of denunciation from the adolescents. Interestingly, it can also, at times, generate grass root community action, as beautifully illustrated by the adolescents of the Artesanos community,

Amanda (presenter): You've seen the library that we created with the goal of trying to help solve the problems in our community. We've run a small survey and we arrived to the conclusion that a big problem is that kids don't learn enough at school and so they can't fend for themselves, they don't understand the teachers, they are scared of asking, and so on. You can see the academy, it works from January to March, the older ones take care of the teaching and teach six kids. Some of the older ones are in university, others have just finished school.

{Pausing the video to comment on footage on a community library and a 'school' set up by the Club} (ArtP, P3)

The talk about the school has radically changed once more. The school has almost ceased to be an institution in the sense used earlier on, and has become a marker of organised action; it could be said that it has become an institution of a different, broader kind. Artesanos's talk about the school no longer focuses on its physical layout and vital statistics, or on feelings of anger and frustration. Instead, their talk is about felt needs and social action. The journey of the school from the physical to the social has found an arrival point.

The exploration of the building block Institutions, carried out via looking into adolescents' talk about the school, has helped us identify the network of connections in which the school is embedded. The connections touch on the understanding of the school as an institution of the community, as well as on the community's role as 'host' of the school. Two ways of talking about the school appear to emerge from the exploration of this building block. In the first one, the school is taken-for-granted, described in its physical characteristics. The second one tells us about the pains and troubles of neglected schools and, more encouragingly, about ways of overcoming this neglect.

#### **II.1.4 The economy**

This building block of the community is made of those instances in which local consumption, exchange and production of social wealth are brought to the fore. This broad notion of the economy includes issues such as fishing, farming, employment and trade. The economy features extensively in the adolescents' investigations. Local economic activities are shown and explained. Individuals are interviewed in their role of traders, craftsmen or other. Economic problems such as unemployment or environmental damage

are put forward, investigated and at times, heatedly discussed solutions to economic issues are proposed, articulated and debated.

As markers of community pride or as indicators of community problems, the economy captures the attention of the adolescents, provoking thought, dialogue and reflection on key aspects of the workings of the community they live in. This section begins to unravel both the meaning of this building block of the economy for the adolescents, and the handling by the adolescents of economic aspects of their communities. For this purpose I will first provide the reader with basic illustrations of this building block to then move on to explore these instances in more depth, teasing out common themes, concerns and initiatives that lie underneath the adolescents' audio-visual presentation of their local economies.

*Camera shows a woman walking by a pile of mud; you can see half-made walls.*

Woman: Little by little I make progress with the job. Little by little I'm building my own house.

Alfonso (voice over): How did you learn to make mud bricks?

Woman: It was my dream to learn how to make these bricks; and there they are, my bricks made to build my house. (ElCD, 12')

*The camera, on a tour of the market, stops at a juice shop, shows images of tables, chair, counters, etc.*

Giovanna (voice over): Here we can see the juice stall that sells juice.

Ernesto (v/o): They sell juice at cheap prices because here the fruit is cheap. Here we've got lots of banana, papaya and all the fruits you can make juice out of. (PanD, 6'50'')

Estela (presenter): As you've just seen, that's Chupaca's slaughterhouse. It provides jobs to those who kill the cattle, to those who trade cattle. It is the only slaughterhouse recognised in the whole Mantaro valley. There used to be another one in Huancayo but it was closed down due to poor hygiene, so they say. Chupaca's slaughterhouse damages the river; as you've seen the slaughterhouse's drains go straight into the river and in the villages downstream they drink the water from the river.



The water is dirty with cattle waste. I don't think it's right. I don't understand how they manage to consider Chupaca's slaughterhouse a hygienic one; I don't see hygiene anywhere (laughs). {pausing the video to comment on over two minutes of footage on the local slaughterhouse}. (ChuP, P1)

The three illustrations above give us an initial flavour of the building block the economy. In the first passage, an interview with a community member is taking place. Among the questions asked, the issue of work arises. The interviewee talks about her dreams and the struggle to build her house. The second passage shows a juice shop in the local market while the voice over tells us about the workings of the local economy, natural resources, pricing, etc. In the third passage, the local slaughterhouse is shown and problematised. A puzzling trade-off between economics and environment is presented, in an articulated, complex way. From the three illustrations we can see that the economy appears shown and talked about not only as such but also as something tightly connected to the community at large, impacting on it, reflecting it. The talk about the economy, the connections made between it and the community, the array of implications of these connections make this building block highly revealing. Let us look at it in more detail.

A first meaningful aspect that arises from a closer look at the adolescents' talk about the community's economy is the significance of economic activities for the community. The economy appears as a constituent of the community altogether, a marker of local pride, a fragment of local identity,

*A Paccha Club boy is speaking to the camera. At the background you can see an industrial complex.*

Helio (speaking to the camera): We're beginning with the activities, with the economic activities that Paccha has. We're going to start with the fishing, the cattle farming, agriculture and so on. At this moment we're seeing one of the main fish farms here in Casaraca. (PacD, 4'55')

*Images of oxen along a street with farmers; they are carrying ploughs.  
There is group laughter as the cows pass by some Club girls.*

Marlene (voice over): Please watch ladies and gentlemen. The beautiful oxen that work our beloved land, that plough the land. [...] Over there the oxen and their owners. With these animals the land is ploughed using an instrument called the plough. They pull and through their strength the land is ploughed. (ChuD, 29'02'')

This positive image of the local economy not only instructs us about the various activities that generate local wealth but more importantly, it tells us about the value of these activities for the adolescents: “these are the activities of my community, my community is made of these activities”. In the first passage, the visual composition is revealing. The background of the words is made by an industrial complex. The boy, looking at the camera, lists, with authority and knowledge, the economic activities in the community. In the second example sound and image build a picture that is as colourful as it is informative. The farmers are walking the oxen to or from the field. They carry the tools needed for working the land. The words tell us plenty about the technicalities of agriculture and the space that this activity occupies in community. A common trait that emerges from both examples is the positive connotation that flows from the talk about economic activities. These are not only a marker of the community, they appear as carrying ‘good’ in itself. The goodness is part of the activity, the community can only benefit from it.

The image of goodness that sprouts from the adolescents’ talk about their economy, as illustrated by the examples above, co-exists with its flipside. Alongside a intrinsically positive view of the economy there is another talk; a talk that, far from conveying any goodness, tells us about an economy that is dissociated from the people in the community; an economy that means harshness and difficulty. The talk here is radically different,

Cesarella (audience): Aside from alcoholism, what other problems do the youth of Cangallo face?

Manuel (presenter): Unemployment, the lack of jobs. There are lots of people that are left with no chances of progress, they

don't have any money. People finish secondary school and you're obliged to go to work. The majority go to Lima or other places. {Responding to a question on the problems in the community} (CanQ, Q1)

*Night images of light posts outside. The shots are blurred and dark.*

Anabella (voice over): As we can observe, some of the light posts are damaged, leaving this area in the dark and very isolated. This creates lots of danger. The authorities don't do anything about this problem and we'd like to request that Electrocentro [local electricity company] do something about it because this is very dangerous to society. (LaVD, 11'22'')

Here the language ceases to be about economic activities bringing good to the community. The focus moves from productive forces to sheer failure. In the first example, a girl and a boy discuss after the presentation of a documentary. The moment to talk about problems arrives and with it the issue of unemployment and lack of opportunity. The connection is blatant: the lack of jobs pushes people out of the rural areas and into the big cities. The second passage tells a story of neglect that hits the community members. The dangers of the dark are attributed to the electricity company, whose activities far from benefiting the community put it at jeopardy.

Thus far, the building block 'the economy' shows two faces. One can be condensed as talk about goodness and progress, the other about harshness and failure. These two narratives that emerge from the documentaries reach deep. They impregnate the various instances in which the economy is explored and problematised. Three of such instances are particularly revealing: the talk about the local market, the talk to local people, and the talk about unemployment. Let us explore them.

A salient aspect of this building block is **the market**. The market appears singled out as a key space in the local economy. The filming of the market is accompanied by interviews with people working in it, by rich and colourful commentary about particularities of the workings of local trade, etc. Talk

about the market provides us with strong indications of its meaning within the broader context of the community. In particular, it helps us understand the ramifications of the two narratives identified above,

*Camera shows, from the street, a small market. Through the metal bars of an open window we can see women buying inside the market; the camera scrolls on the market, which is fairly bare and almost empty.*

Hugo (voice over): Here is the market where all of us come to shop. We don't have a market that sells rice, sugar and everything; this one only sells vinegar and that sort of thing. But we want more because we need it. (ElCD, 4'20'')

*Images of a street market. The camera 'walks' among the shoppers.*

Marlene (voice over): In this place the Saturday's fair takes place in which traders offer their produce. These days the economy has gone down a bit here in Chupaca, I mean there's plenty on offer but not a lot of good deals. In the fair you get people selling lechón, bread, and homemade sweets. Lechon is made from an animal called pork, the women themselves raise them. (ChuD, 16'57'')

Both examples talk about the market as a place of exchange of goods; both examples address problems with the market; both tell us about market conditions. In the first example however, the market is the place to buy products, in the second example the market is the place to sell products. The portrayal of the market from the perspective of the buyer and from the perspective of the vendor has important implications. It helps us understand the local economy in terms of consumption or of production. These two views indicate the place the economy has in the community. Under one narrative, the economy is about providing goods and services needed by the population. As the example of the El Carmen market illustrates, this provision is faulty, local needs are unmet. The economy appears as failing, and community members feel the negative impact of it. On the other hand, the narrative of production tells us about the market as a place for the generation of wealth, as a productive force; a wealth that, in the eyes of the commentator in the Chupaca Saturday fair, is undergoing a temporary period of strain.

Another fruitful way of looking at the production/consumption perspectives is by exploring the **interviews with people** carried out by the adolescents with respect to the issue of the economy. Here we concentrate on the interviews in which the purpose of the enquiry focuses on the economic role of community members. In practice this means the interviews of people in their capacities of traders, farmers, doctors, etc.

*Interview with shopkeeper in a grocery shop. The camera shows the interviewee, who carries on serving a client.*

Nelson (voice over): How are sales going madam?

Shopkeeper: So, so.

Nelson (v/o): What day do you get more customers?

Shopkeeper: On Sundays

Nelson (v/o): Does the business support your family?

Shopkeeper: Not so much these days, there's plenty of competition.

Nelson (v/o): What's your opinion on the market's cleanliness?

Shopkeeper: [Un-understandable]

Nelson (v/o): And how often does the garbage collector come by?

Greengrocer: Every now and again. (PanD, 7'45'')

*A Club boy [Oscar] is sitting on a chair. To his side there's a 'transvestite', and standing behind him there's another man. On the other side there is another Club boy [Valdo], tape recording the interview.*

[...]

Oscar: And your job, how are you doing in your job? [The beauty salon] is yours, isn't it?

Tamisha: It is mine and it's doing well, thank heaven. I've been going for two years and I've got good support. When I need something, they come over and they paint, and they don't charge me because they're my friends.

Oscar: You don't have problems, you've built it up your beauty salon yourself, haven't you?

Tamisha: Yes, on my own [...] (CalD, 18'50'')

The examples illustrate an interview with a greengrocer and a with beauty salon owner. Both passages share the fact that the questions are addressed to the individuals in their economic roles. Both interviewees talk about their business within the context of the local economic situation. The greengrocer's answers convey a feeling of difficulty, there's lots of competition and sales are

not at their best. On the other hand, Tamisha, the beauty salon manager, tells us that the business is doing very well. Behind these two self-diagnoses however, there appears another level of talk. For the greengrocer, the causes of the difficulties are to be found in the local economic conditions of the time, which do not help her business. Tamisha's understanding of her success, on the other hand, is to be located in the support provided by friends and in the efforts put by her into the business. While for the former the issue is an economic one, for the latter it is a matter of a supportive social network. Again, the economy as a building block of the community, occupies different spaces within different narratives. The greengrocer's example illustrates the narrative of the productive force of the economy, one that unfortunately is not being helpful at the time of the interview. Tamisha's talk, on the other hand, illustrates a narrative of the economy as struggle, one to be fought in co-operation with other members of the community.

Finally a third way of looking at the folds of the narratives of the building block 'the economy' is by exploring the treatment given by the adolescents to the issue of **unemployment**. Unemployment, a topic that is conspicuously absent from the 'production' talk about the economy, sits uncomfortably within an economy of need. If the economy is about obtaining what is needed, then unemployment appears as something puzzling,

*Images of the main square; zoom on a group of men standing on the sidewalk having a conversation.*

Huber (voice over): As you can see, we're in the main square where we've got a group of adults drinking. Why is this? Because there are no jobs; lot's of unemployment in our town. That's why people resort to alcohol. Others, gathering over there, are young people with nothing to do. But, I'd say that they should ... there has be a job!?! (EICD, 2')

Unemployment appears as an evil and as a mystery at the same time. Apart from the problematic impact on alcohol consumption, unemployment poses a challenge to the understanding of the local economy. A challenge that is picked up by the audience after the presentation of the documentary, as

illustrated by the passage below, which is part of the question time that followed the presentation of the documentary quoted above,

Anita (audience): I'd like to ask, if there's no money, rather than spending it on alcohol why don't they invest in something?

Andrea (audience member from the presenting Club): I want to answer that question. They don't buy beer but wine that sometimes they get on credit, not with money. And with respect to jobs, there are no jobs because there's lots of exploitation in the farms. People work 24 hours to be paid a misery. There's also the fact that they haven't gone to school so they can't get work in Chinchu.<sup>12</sup>

Pilar (audience member from the presenting Club): Exactly, the majority of young people ...

Josefina (presenter): Some of them haven't even finished quinto<sup>13</sup>

Lucrecia (presenter): The majority of young people finish secondary school but they don't carry on studying, instead they go straight to the farms, do you know what I mean? (EICQ, Q1)

The discussion on unemployment acquires a revealing dimension. Behind the apparent lack of opportunity reside the harsh and exploitative conditions of rural work. But, the way out is, as in the example of Cangallo mentioned earlier, the emigration to bigger cities. In this case, Chinchu provides opportunities but demands education. El Carmen in turn, provides an uphill path for whoever engages in the venture of studying. The fields appear to be looking from above, as an ever-present menace, as the pit in which to fall at any time. The terms of the struggle to keep up are finally fleshed out in a vivid exchange between El Carmen adolescents and the audience,

Olga (audience): A question; you say that there are no jobs, but what do you plan to do when you finish school? Work? Drink like the other people? I mean, what will you do?

Pilar (audience member from the presenting Club): No; what we want to do is to carry on studying, to move on to higher education.

Olga (audience): But, if there are no jobs, how will you study? You need money to carry on studying.

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<sup>12</sup> Chinchu is the capital city of the province of the same name, where El Carmen -the community hosting the Adolescent Club- belongs. Chinchu provides employment for qualified El Carmen population.

<sup>13</sup> 'Quinto', Spanish language word for 'fifth', refers to the fifth and last grade of high school.

Pilar (audience member from the presenting Club): Well, yeah, we'll have to work.

Olga (audience): ... and to study.

Andrea: Exactly (applauses and bravos from the audience).  
(ElCQ, Q6)

To summarise this building block, the exploration of adolescents' talk about the economy in general and the market, the working people and unemployment in particular, tells us about the workings of two narratives. One understands the economy as a system that produces wealth, as something good in itself. The local economic activities are a happy constituent of the local identity. The economy, under this narrative, may undergo moments of weakness and in consequence, it will produce less wealth. Nevertheless, this transitory happening must not be mistaken as an inherent fault; sooner or later economic development will take place. A second narrative depicts the economy in terms of harshness. The relationship between it and the population is one of difficulty and of struggle. Against a background of almost economic hopelessness, the community members look at bettering each other rather than putting faith in the system.

### **II.1.5 Traditions**

Traditions, as a building block of the community, constitute local festivities, local dances and religious celebrations portrayed as handed down practices recreated by the community as part of the local cultural repertoire. Needless to say, the array of traditions in general and traditional practices in particular which appear in the film documentaries vastly exceeds the ones that can be explored here. For example, certain economic practices or certain authority structures bear the weight of the forces of traditions and the adolescents show and tell us plenty about them. But, for the sake of the interpretative strategy followed here I have decided to include under this section only the traditions that evoke, directly or indirectly, a sense of celebration. In particular I focused on the issues that were identified as traditions by the adolescents themselves.



Diana (presenter): Well, as we can see, the province of Cangallo is very religious because, more than anything, we've got traditions. In January we have the "Procession of the bulls"; in February there's the carnival; then we have Easter celebrations; and then we have the 15th of August. Well, yes, it is a very religious city. {Pausing the video to comment on over seven minutes of footage on local festivities} (CanP, P12)

Traditions occupy a significant space in the construction of the community. They appear talked about as something that is a constituent part of the life of the community, something certainly related to the religious past but not just to it alone. The adolescents comment on local celebrations, about what is distinctive of their communities, about something that appears to be, in their eyes, of significant value for the community. In their talk however, they tell us about the traditions in ways that convey different intensities in the lived experience of the tradition at stake for the adolescents. Three distinctive ways of experiencing and relating tradition, or better-said, traditional celebrations, emerged from the analysis of the documentaries.

First, traditions appear narrated as a distinctive marker of community identity. Words and image are utilised at length to relate the space and importance of local traditional celebrations. Celebrations are explained in extreme detail, care is taken in conveying the meaning of every little aspect of the festivity being illustrated. As illustrated by the passage above, the community *lives* by its traditions, chronological time seems to respond to the timing of festivities. The adolescents demonstrate good knowledge of local practices in this respect, a knowledge that they appear ready and willing to share with others, conveying a strong sense of importance of the tradition in the everyday life of the community.

Huber (presenter): This is a traditional dance in our village of El Carmen; it is called "El Negrito". We celebrate it from the 24th to the 28th of December. {Pausing the video to comment on around three minutes of footage on a local dance} (ElCD, P6)

Here again, time and effort are spent in illustrating a traditional local dance. The narration seems to concentrate on the tradition as such and on the people participating in its celebration. As it were, traditions are experienced from 'the inside' and, from the inside, related to the audience. Little, if any, separation is conveyed between community and tradition.

A second cluster of talk about traditional celebrations orients our attention to different aspects of this building block. Here, care and detail appear which conveyed an intensity similar to the one discussed above. However, in contrast to the first cluster, here traditions are not only narrated from the inside, they are also put into a wider local context. Traditions are still a marker of community identity, but additionally, they occupy an integrated and inter-related space in the life of the community,

Victor (presenter): The people, after working all day -all week they work and they have free days like Saturdays and Sundays- they go and have fun. On Saturdays and Sundays we have the "Cortamontes", the famous Cortamontes as they are called here in Ayacucho; they consist of dancing around a tree with your partner, drinking chicha<sup>14</sup> and alcohol. {Pausing the video to comment on around two minutes of footage of a local festivity} (ArtP, P5)

The Cortamontes celebration takes place 'after work', in the 'free time'. Here, rather than the community 'being' the celebration, the community 'goes' to the celebration. It goes after work. The 'location' of the tradition is not just determined by chronological time or by physical space. There is also a social and economic plotting of the tradition, one that seems to connote a degree of tension. This relationship of tension between work and celebration is spelt out, made explicit in the very portrayal of the dance. The celebration appears not just experienced and reported but observed and framed, circumscribed within a broader system of events. This rather de-centred understanding of tradition tells as about celebrations as a part of the community, one however, whose role must not be under-estimated,

*The camera shows images of a church from the outside (no words). It then shows the inside of the church; mass is being delivered. The camera is focused on a cross by the altar; the church looks full of people.*

Juliana (voice over): More than 90% of the people here are catholic, despite the influence of other groups.

*The camera begins a pan on the people assisting mass.*

Juliana (v/o): They seek refuge in god because of the big economic crisis that our country is going through. (CalD, 1'28'')

As illustrated in this passage, the juxtaposition between tradition and work acquires a new layer of intensity. Images of a traditional celebration appear in composition with words that tell us about local statistics, but more importantly, about social and economic issues. The community not just goes to the celebration, but it seeks refuge in it. The relationship between tradition and social problems is spelled out explicitly. Tradition still appears as a marker of the community; however, this marker acquires its local meaning within a constellation of other significations.

Finally, the third way of narrating tradition moves away from the understanding of tradition as a live constituent of the community system, and further away from seeing tradition as indistinguishable from the community. Instead tradition appears as something belonging to the past (or belonging elsewhere) that the community preserves in objects in which it sediments.

Rosa (presenter): This dance also has aspects from the jungle. Why? Because there was a war -the battle of Carato- during which many people from Chupaca escaped to the jungle, and when they returned years later, they brought this dance with them. It's a bit modified now, well the dresses are; they have shells that ayanicas<sup>15</sup> also use. They also have feathers -the shupas- that people wear on their heads. The shupas are peacock feathers and they are more expensive than the rest of the dress. {Pausing the video to comment on around one minute of footage showing a monument to the shapi culture} (ChuP, P4)

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<sup>14</sup> Chicha is a local -home made- drink with high alcohol content.

<sup>15</sup> Ayanicas are an ethnic group from the Central Jungle.

*'Walking' shot up to a grotto. A voice over speaks as the camera walks us into the grotto. The camera stops, shows the surrounding grotto, and then zooms into a statue of a virgin.*

Elisabeth (voice over): This is the grotto of the virgin Lurdes. As we can see it is well built, but there's not enough room for those who come here to pray. The seats look nice and there are some flowers around. Over there we can see the virgin, she too has been adorned with flowers. (ChuD, 7'15'')

In these passages, the verbal commentary is supported by footage of monuments appertaining to the culture to which the traditions belong. In sharp contrast to the first two clusters, these traditions are illustrated with physical rather than social images. The tradition appears preserved in monuments that testify to it, but do not experience it. The commentary that accompanies the images of the monuments provides, like in the other examples, abundant detail. Nevertheless, and in a clear departure from the previous examples, this information appears, as it were, reported from 'the outside'. In this cluster, traditions seem relegated to a place, rather than a practice, embodied in the world of objects rather than the world of subjects; here traditions appear embalmed.

In conclusion, the building block 'tradition' appears to be an important constituent of the community in the eyes of the adolescents. Although all documentaries dedicated time and space to the issue, and although traditions occupied a significant part of the discussions, the ways in which they were portrayed shows different understandings of the building block. As we have seen, in the first cluster traditions were something inseparable from the basic tissue of the community; traditions were pervasive and extended right to the observable horizon of the community. A second cluster, on the other hand, portrayed traditions as something very significant in the community, which was connected to a broader picture of community life; traditions appeared both intensively experienced and de-centred. Finally, a third cluster talked about traditions from a physical perspective; here traditions were a building block that pertained to the objective rather than the social dimension of the

community; these were embalmed traditions. Nevertheless, as pervasive, de-centred or embalmed, traditions make, in the eyes of the adolescents, a significant part of the community.

## **II.2 Putting the building blocks together: two short stories of community**

The lengthy excursion into the building blocks of the community allowed us to explore the ways in which the adolescents, collectively, make sense of the place in which they. These building blocks appear shown, talked about, problematised, shaped and reshaped, debated and contrasted by the young women and men; in short, they appear *performed* time and again by the adolescents taking part in, following Paulo Freire, an open-ended process of reading the world they live in. In this process, the community emerges as an entire universe open to interpretation and reinterpretation; and, as such, it is transformed from a reality to be passively accepted, to a reality that can be creatively acted upon.

The process of communication combining two media -image and spoken word- enhances the horizon of expression of young boys and girls, thus adding substantively to the venture of sharing an understanding of the community. In this process, adolescents from different, isolated areas share views, peculiarities, likes and dislike, pleasures and pains of the art of everyday living. At times the stories told by the adolescents point towards things that are very special in the communities. At times, the stories seem to blend into one another, generating common narratives. At times, moreover, different voices seem to be telling the same story. In these labyrinths of meaning however, the journey itself appears to yield more treasure than the point of arrival.

What follows is another trip through the labyrinth. This time, the building blocks themselves constitute the environment for the journey. For this journey, I looked into the stories gathered from the various building blocks; here, the aim was to make sense of them at a higher level of abstraction. In other words, I set to look for more comprehensive themes that would enable me to work out ways of piecing together the building blocks into meaningful 'stories of community'. This interpretative operation yielded two such stories, a *story of development* and a *story of survival*.

#### *A story of community development*

Cutting across the building blocks, there is an issue that appears as fundamental in the understanding of the community: the issue of development. Development, with its inherently dynamic connotations, seems to provide a bedrock for the explanation not only of the direction in the community is moving, but also of the way in which the many pieces that make the mosaic of the community are distributed.

In the story of development the economy, for example, is talked about in terms of wealth-production. Understood in this way, economic activities are invested with two main traits: functionally, they are ventures for the creation of wealth, and symbolically, they are positive markers of local identity. Pride oozes from the audio-visual accounts of communities' economic activities. Flowing underneath these stories there is the belief that activities generate wealth and wealth generates development. In line with this focus on wealth production, the market is viewed and discussed as a place for selling produce, and in so doing, contributing to the local economy. Development possesses the quality of being good in itself, of inevitably bringing goodness to the community. As such, community development is something good even before any goodness is actually delivered; before the community members assess its quality. In the same vein, and because development *will* bring goodness, any

symptom showing that the long-awaited benefits have not materialised, are metabolised as something temporary.

Traditions, on the other hand, appear to be standing in the way of development. As such, they seem to be destined to the past, their memory preserved in monuments that pay tribute to them while removing any obstacle that may hamper the journey towards development. In this vein, they are separated out from the people, deprived from their social traits and confined to history. People, in turn, are understood in terms of duties and responsibilities towards the developing community. The polluters, for example, are irresponsible people and get the blame they deserve. The authorities too must behave responsibly and so they get their share of blame if they do not. However, while blame becomes denunciation in the case of the polluters, it is restricted to expressions of frustration in the case of the authorities. The authorities, in this story of development, reside above the ordinary members of the community. They are the ones in charge of leading the community into development. In this vein, their responsibility in achieving this mission makes them partially immune to ordinary members' interference.

In the story of development, the community appears understood as a differentiated system, which is moving towards progress. The economy seems to be the sub-system that more clearly exemplifies this view, generating wealth, employing people, producing goods and services, and more significantly, experiencing ups and downs. In the community as a system, even the park is understood in these terms. The park gives and takes, it demands that people behave responsibly, and in exchange it provides beauty, comfort and pride. The people too are part of the system. People occupy positions in it, they have roles, duties and responsibilities, they get rewarded and punished, etc.; above all, the people seem to be incorporated into the

system. In short, the community appears a system moving -like a planet- towards development.

*A story of community survival*

Standing alongside the story of community development, there is a story of community struggle. Here the community ceases to be a system that has an overarching goal. Instead, it becomes an arena for exercising the struggle of everyday living. This story is captured in the building block *Open spaces*. As thermometers of the community at large, as stages where the community appears performed, open spaces supply strong metaphors of what it means to live in the community. In this story they are seen as characterised by neglect, dirt and violence, as the harsh background against which everyday life unfolds.

In this story of survival the economy appears as a forum for subsistence. The market is that place where hopefully basic needs will be met. The economy here is talked about in terms of unemployment, deprivation and lack of opportunity; issues that appear either resisted via the activation of social networks of support or suffered via the endurance of economic exile or stagnation. In this vein, traditions are a full part of the community, acting as mechanisms for winding down, for coping with survival, or for escaping the harshness of the struggle for survival. The idea of system that characterises the development story of community does not seem to fit in this story of survival. Rather than 'sub-systems' at work, all we see are people struggling.

In the story of survival, people struggle to meet basic needs, to get an education or a job, to be safe when walking around. In this respect, people appear to rely chiefly on other people and not on any imagined system. The community is seen as a network of people rather than as a system with people. As such, the polluters, as members of this network, are not the targets of acts of denunciation for the garbage scattered around the community.



(They are however, targets of expressions of frustration.) The authorities, on the other hand, do not appear to belong to this network of people. Instead they seem to occupy a place outside; a place with little connection with the network. Positioned in this way, the authorities become a main target of blame, receiving a large share of the condemnation for the community's misfortunes. Understood in terms of survival, the community seems to unfold in hostile terms, taking plenty and giving little in return.

*Between development and survival: the community as an arena*

The two stories of community sketched above tell us about the relationship between the adolescents and the place in which they live. These stories, which cannot be mapped onto any specific geographical community, inhabit in the lives of the adolescents who spelt them out. Moreover, these are not stories that belong to any one adolescent. On the contrary, they reside in the intersubjective space that on the other hand, allows their emergence. Further, these stories of community possess both the force of what is held-to-be true and proper, and the contingency of what is agreed as true and proper in a particular context of space and time. As such, and until further notice, the stories provide the adolescents with the symbolic resources to connect and disconnect themselves with their everyday life environment.

As illustrated along the journey in and out the building blocks, the stories of community gradually emerge from within different kinds of dialogues. First, the adolescents as filmmakers inquire in the community and generate local audio-visual stories. Second, they share these stories with a broader public of other adolescents, most of whom do not know the geographical area being presented. In the process of sharing the stories, new meanings come to the fore; the innumerable 'pauses' eloquently demonstrate this. Third, the adolescents discuss the stories presented, challenging certain issues, endorsing certain others, and above all, adding new meanings to the stories of community. As a 'system moving towards development' or as a 'network

struggling to survive', the community is portrayed collectively by the adolescents participating in it.

The community emerging from this process of participation can be best defined as an *arena*. Understood in this way, the community provides a background and demands active performance from the actors involved in it. Performances, however, are not reduced to following a script. As seen along this exploration, the adolescents negotiate time and again the meanings that are to be performed. In this open ended process of negotiation, subjective experiences, norms and values, as much as 'facts out there' appear in the making. The community as an arena provides boundaries but allows for 'collective improvisation'; performers, in turn, rely on each other to 'follow the rhythm' and 'execute in tune'. This creative process of communication has as its lifeblood the agency of the adolescents taking part.

# Chapter 6

## Our Sexuality I

### Friends & Family

This chapter provides the first of two analyses of a series of explorations of sexuality carried out by the adolescent boys and girls belonging to the Clubs, within the framework of the project SaRA. As was the case in the previous chapter, this chapter is divided into two parts. Part I is a methodological note detailing the rationale employed in the analysis and interpretation of the data. Part II provides the results of the analysis. Once again, although the reader is invited to explore the generation of paths for data analysis described in the methodological note (Part I), the two parts that make this chapter can be considered -and read- independently.

#### **I. Methodological note**

At this point, it may be helpful to remind the reader that the overall strategy for analysis of the data collected<sup>1</sup> was to arrange the audio visual material into sequences of i) film, ii) presentation of the film and iii) discussion of the film. I collected a total of 24 such sequences, 16 of which addressed issues regarding sexuality. This chapter presents the first of two analyses of these sexuality sequences.

The adolescents explored the theme of sexuality via the realisation of *dramas* in video format,<sup>2</sup> which were later presented and discussed by the adolescents in workshops. For the purpose of analysis, I transcribed all the audio-visual

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<sup>1</sup> See table 4.1 in chapter four for a summary of the data collected and its arrangement for analysis.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter four, section two, for details.

records of these sixteen sequences.<sup>3</sup> The following describes the steps in the analysis of the transcripts of the 16 sequences on sexuality.

The first stage in the data analysis was the coding<sup>4</sup> of all the texts<sup>5</sup>; that is, the 16 sequences of dramas, presentations and discussions. A coding scheme was designed, based on three broad categories and 23 *codes*, as follows:

1. Category: Location

Codes (7): Bar; Hospital; Home; Park; School; Street; and Other

2. Category: Participants

Codes (7): Boy and girl; Boys; Girls; Mixed group; Parents; Parents and children; and Other

3. Category: Interactional Topic

Codes (9): Abortion; Bonding; Chat up performance; Family life; Fighting; Partying; Pregnancy; Work; and Other

All the data was coded under the coding scheme outlined above.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that whenever the meaning of the data exceeded the definition of the

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<sup>3</sup> See chapter four, section four, for details.

<sup>4</sup> With respect to the transcripts of the audio-visual text, the coding of the text and the handling of the coded text for analysis purposes was done using the text interpretation software package Atlas/Ti. For the handling of the audio-visual text I carried out the following procedure. All video material was converted from the original VHS, Hi8 and/or Video8 formats (in Pal and/or NTCS norms –see chapter four, section three for details on recording procedures) into digital format. All the material was subsequently recorded into CD-ROMs, as QuickTime Movie archives. These archives, which can be played on popup windows on screen without having to close Atlas/Ti (where the written transcripts pertaining to the same original documents were archived for analysis purposes), were kept open for viewing purposes as the analysis of written text was done on Atlas/Ti. This procedure allowed me to carry out the analysis process using written and audio-visual records in parallel. Parallel usage of written and audio-visual records enabled me (not without difficulties) to take advantage of the richness of the moving image, while profiting from the systematic ordering of data that Atlas/Ti allows for.

<sup>5</sup> Following Rose (2000) I determined the *camera shot* as unit of analysis for the coding of the transcripts of the audio-visual data.

<sup>6</sup> The coding scheme was kept broad and loose enough to allow for the coding of two heterogeneous sources of data, that is, the dramas and the videos recording of presentations

code, the text was coded under more than one code; on several occasions, text was coded under several codes.

Once this stage was completed, and following the same strategy implemented in chapter four, all the coded text in each of the codes was printed out together, producing code-wise printouts (e.g. all the quotations under the code 'family life' appeared constituting a 'new text'). Code-wise printouts allowed me to move away from 'individual' stories, in particular to detach myself from the plots of the dramas, and to concentrate on those aspects of the stories that were more in line with the conceptual curiosity that brought me in contact with the text.

Code-wise printouts were read and re-read with the goal of fleshing out thematic commonalities. The initial interest here was to find out whether there were salient patterns in the adolescents' talk about their sexuality. At this stage of the analysis, the search for patterns was facilitated by the code-wise reading of the transcripts of the sequences of drama-presentation of drama-discussion of drama; code-wise readings smoothed the task of working with highly complex data. Nevertheless, the process of identification of significant patterns did not unfold in a linear fashion. On the contrary, instances of mapping concepts, of arranging and re-arranging clusters of meanings, of connecting, reconnecting (and very often disconnecting) strings of significations proved to be a demanding, and painstaking exercise.

The quest for balancing the appeal of certain issues that arise from analysing codes, with the popularity of these issues across sequences, can at times be a very frustrating venture. For example, topics such as the relationship between sex and drugs can intuitively be seen as relevant in the examination of adolescents' sense making of their sexuality. On the other hand, although the

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and discussions. The data coming from the presentations and the discussions was coded only under category number 3: Interactional Topic.

issue sex and drugs did arise in the data at my disposal, the attention given to it and the popularity of it as a salient matter did not prove to be substantive. In other words, sex and drugs, however appealing an issue they might sound, were discarded in the process of data analysis. In short, to qualify as a salient pattern, the aspect under examination had to be both thickly addressed and connected in the codes, and popular across the sequences.

Before moving into the actual findings of this leg of empirical analysis, I will point out two important aspects that were considered with respect to the scrutiny of the data. First, special attention was paid to those codes in which an argumentative attitude was taken by the people involved. With no intention of disqualifying the analytic potential encapsulated in those codes in which 'taken-for-granted' are irreflexively reproduced (e.g. a scene in which someone says hello to someone else), the point to make here is that codes that contain discussion are of particular analytic value when it comes to exploring processes of collective reflection. The second point regards a contrast between the data analysis carried out in chapter five and the one discussed here. While the analysis of the community was done by looking into documentaries, the analysis here is on dramas. Analysis of different genre like these two demands a different perspective. In particular, the analysis presented in chapter five was done by examining what, in brief, can be called *processes of representation and problematisation of community*. On the other hand, the analysis of the dramas was carried out by examining *processes of enactment and problematisation of sexuality*. The singularities of these two processes are owed largely to the characteristics of the genres -documentary and drama. The choice of genre, which was explained conceptually in chapter four,<sup>7</sup> allowed the adolescents to explore more freely the issues of community and sexuality. Dramas in particular, allowed the interplay of fictional roles and real concerns, which enabled them to take the process of discovery further, while opening up a rich analytic field before the eyes of the researcher.

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<sup>7</sup> See chapter four, section three.

Two central themes at the heart of the adolescents' collective talk and reflection about their sexuality arose from my analysis of the coded data. A first matter relates to the social networks within which they communicate sexuality. Sexuality is experienced as a phenomenon of life that unfolds *with* others. As such, the *networks of communication* that act as media for making sense of sexuality, play a fundamental role in shaping the understanding and exercising of sexuality by the adolescents. In this respect, two central networks of communication were identified: the family and the peers, which appeared as the two privileged avenues for the disclosure of sexuality. The second theme that arose, both thickly addressed in the codes and popular across sequences, relates to one basic region of sexuality. The adolescents dedicated a wealth of emotional investment, social articulation and cultural force to this key aspect of their sexual lives: the *experience of pregnancy*. Pregnancy was, to an extent, a 'predictable' topic. Adolescent pregnancy occupies infinite space on TV, teen magazines, books, bar chats, etc. However, it is not pregnancy as an insulated phenomenon but the collective reflection on the experience of pregnancy and the embedment of pregnancy within everyday life context that arise as a central theme from the adolescents' stories and discussions of sexuality.

Summing up, two themes encapsulate the analytical foci of the collective reflections on sexuality carried out by the adolescents taking part in Project SaRA: family and peers as the two main networks of communication of sexuality, and the experience of pregnancy. While the latter will be dealt with in chapter seven, the remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to presenting the actual findings of the analysis of the theme of the family and peers as networks of communication enacted and problematised by the adolescents.

## **II. The Family and Peers explored**

This section introduces the results of the first exploration of the investigations made by the adolescents of their sexuality. The text is divided into three parts. The first two parts (II.1 and II.2) looks at the adolescents' explorations of the two networks of communication that, in their own eyes, shape their sexuality most, that is, the Family and Peers. These networks will be introduced, defined and inspected, focusing especially on the meanings that sprout from them and to the handling of these meanings by the adolescents. The third part (II.3) puts forward a conceptual integration of these two networks of communication.

### **II.1 Mums, dads, aunties and children: the adolescents and their families**

I have divided the analysis of the workings of the family as a network of communication in four sections. In the first section (II.1.1), the aim is to provide an initial location of the space dedicated by the adolescents to the family, in particular to the flow of communication between the family and themselves. Subsequently, I will discuss details of the structural characteristics of the family as a network of communication; I will do so by examining the treatment of relations of care and neglect as enacted and problematised by the adolescents (II.1.2). The following section (II.1.3) will introduce an analysis of the way the adolescents *imagine* the family as an ideal network of communication. Lastly, I will provide a conceptual summary of the main points discussed on the issue of the family as a communication network (section II.1.4).



### II.1.1 Hi mum! Introducing the family

The family appears as a central network of communication in the dramas, presentations and discussions; the presence and importance of the family in the adolescents' lives seems to be unquestionable. As we shall see, the family sets boundaries, provides guidelines, facilitates, hinders; in short, the family appears as a key communicative player in the process of disclosure of the world for the adolescents. In the next paragraphs, and relying on three *consecutive* scenes extracted from a drama realised by the adolescents of the Andean community of Chupaca, I will very briefly illustrate the tenor with which the adolescents enacted the richness of family relations.

*Outdoors. It is daylight. Close up of a door. A man –Anselmo<sup>8</sup>– arrives, he has a briefcase in his hand; he takes out a key, opens the door and gets in. He goes to the kitchen, where a woman in an apron – Eulogia– is cooking.*

*Anselmo kissing Eulogia: Hi honey.*

*Eulogia: Hello. Take a sit and have some lunch.*

*Anselmo sitting down at the table, and wearing a crisp shirt and a tie: what have you prepared?*

*Eulogia laughing shyly: Errrrr, I've cooked... what has come out. Let's wait for a little while until the girls get back from school, ok?*

*Anselmo: Fine.*

*Eulogia: In the meantime I'll take the food to the table. Eulogia begins taking the plates to the table.*

*Anselmo: It looks tasty.*

*Eulogia: Thanks. Cooking's my speciality.*

*(ChuADr, 1'10'')<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> The names that appear in the quotations that come from the dramas have been kept the same as the names give to the characters by the adolescents (where no name was given, I invented one). The names used to identify the adolescents that appear in the quotations relative to the presentations and discussions of the dramas are all fictional.

<sup>9</sup> The index in brackets reads as follows: the first three letters (i.e. 'Chu') refer to the community that produced the drama (in the example, the rural village of Chupaca); the fourth letter (i.e. 'A') refers to workshop in which drama was presented (in the example, the workshop held in Ayacucho –for details on the workshops please refer to chapter four, section two); the fifth and sixth letters (i.e. 'Dr') refer to the type of document (in this example, like in all the examples in this chapter, Dr refers to drama). The numeric code after

This ordinary, almost dull, scene of everyday life helps us start sketching a picture of the space the family occupies as a network of communication in the lives of adolescent boys and girls. The scene begins with the shot of a door, framed from the outside. The type of door, a heavy metal and glass one, leads us to believe that it is a front door, one that seems to be ‘waiting’ for someone to open it. We still don’t know if it will be opened from the inside or from the outside, nor do we know who will open it. Anselmo arrives to the mysterious door and opens it with his own set of keys. The mystery begins to clear up. It is his home.

Anselmo is smartly dressed with a crisp, white shirt and a tie, and has briefcase. His appearance and the time of the day tell us that he’s back from work; further, it tells us that, like many others in small towns, he goes home for lunch. A small town with its small town life provide the socio-geographical background to the empty door scene. Anselmo enters his home and finds Eulogia in. We learn that she is his partner, probably his wife. In this shot, we see that Eulogia is getting the meal ready. Her timing seems well calibrated and as Anselmo arrives, the food is ready to be taken to the table. The almost mechanical flavour of the scene hints that Anselmo goes home for lunch often, probably even daily; it also hints that Eulogia is in charge of the cooking.

Eulogia’s cooking duty seems to fall somewhat heavily on her shoulders. The menu she has prepared – “I’ve cooked what has come out” – tells us that she’s rushed the meal. A rushed meal put together with the daily task of getting it ready seems to convey that although Eulogia is a skilled cook, she does not have enough time to dedicate to cooking. Even if we do not know what Eulogia has cooked, we do know from Anselmo that “it looks tasty”. Anselmo’s compliment seems, at first sight, to be directed to the quality of the

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the comma (i.e. 1’10’’) indicates location of the passage in the transcript, in our case the passage comes one minute and ten seconds into the drama.

meal, but not just to it. His words provide a reassuring relief to Eulogia, who was unable to cook something other than “what has come out”. Anselmo’s compliment tells us about a crucial approval: one that relieves as much as it perpetuates Eulogia’s cooking role, a role raised by her, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, to the level of “speciality”.

The carefully articulated ordinary flavour of the scene played by Eulogia and Anselmo helps us locate the family within the boundaries of everyday life, carrying out an apparently intranscendental daily lunch. Let us look a bit more into the folds of the life of this family:

*Eulogia and Anselmo are in the kitchen. Someone knocks at the door.*

Eulogia: I’m coming! It must be the girls. I’ll be back in a second, ok? *Eulogia goes and opens the door; two adolescent girls in school uniforms –Angélica and Silvina- go in.*

Eulogia: Hello my sweethearts.

Angélica and Silvina: Hi mum.

Eulogia: How was school? I was just about to serve lunch.

*The three walk into the kitchen.*

Angélica and Silvina: Hi dad.

Anselmo: Hello, hello.

Eulogia: I hope you like it. Start eating please.

Angélica and Silvina: Thank you mum.

*The four begin to eat the meal.*

*(ChuADr, 2’10”)*

Angélica and Silvina are back from school. Mum rushes to the door and greets them in. She shows a mechanical interest in her daughters’ school day, which is not acknowledged by the girls, who instead opt for greeting their father and joining the meal scene. The complete family now sit around the table. Mum encourages Angélica and Silvina to help themselves to the food, which they do and thus proceed to enjoy the meal in the company of mum and dad.

This simple scene of cushioned, ordinary family life seems to flow almost naturally from the previous one, which portrayed Anselmo as yet another husband arriving home for the daily lunch, appropriately prepared by his

wife. Although there seems to be little of interest in these scenes, it is the tidy softness of the whole picture, so craftily articulated, that becomes the focus of attention. The roles of mother, father and children do not seem to provide anything novel. Dad is back from work, the girls are back from school and mum takes care of it all (although she looks a bit overburdened, which not novel either). A feeling of care and protection oozes from the scene in an almost un-containable fashion. But, let us carry on looking into the lives of Anselmo, Eulogia, Angélica and Silvina in search of more clues to help us understand what is going on. Let us go briefly to the scene that follows the meal.

*Eulogia and her daughters Silvina and Angélica are in the kitchen; the three look worried. Someone knocks at the door.*

Angélica: It must be him, mum.

Eulogia: Yes, it looks like he's back.

Silvina: Is it him?

*Anselmo gets in very drunk, banging on the door. His shirt is untucked, his tie is draped around his neck.*

Angélica and Silvina: Dad!!

Eulogia: Look at the state you're in. Is this the right time to come back home? The three of us were so worried about you, but you were having fun with your friends.

Anselmo: Let me tell you what has happened. I was fired from my job.

Eulogia: and is this enough reason for you to come back home in this state? And on top of it drunk?

Anselmo: I've been fired! I've suffered a lot for you three! And you don't answer back right?!

Eulogia: and who are you to say that?

Anselmo: You calm down?!? *He pushes Eulogia violently*

Eulogia: Don't you dare be disrespectful with me. *She him pushes back*

Anselmo: You calm down!! *He starts beating Eulogia. Angélica and Silvina intervene.*

Angélica and Silvina: Dad!!!

Anselmo: And you two stay out of this!!! *He beats Angélica and Silvina too and goes to collapse on a sofa. The girls go to console their mother who is on the floor.*

Angélica and Silvina: Mum, mum, please stand up.

(ChuADr, 5'57")

Family life seems to have turned unbearably sour, to say the least. The peaceful care and understanding of the first two scenes have given way to an array of abuse and confusion. In just 'three consecutive scenes' of family life, the adolescents from Chupaca have given us a powerful indication of breadth and vividness with which the family was enacted in the dramas. What sense making lies behind this understanding of the family as an explosive mix of cosy care and callous aggression? What interpretations do adolescents who created the story derive from these carefully produced moving images? And those who watched them? Or is it just that the creative imagination of the authors of the drama has gone a bit wild? Regarding this last question, we learn the following from the adolescent who presented the drama:

Arella (presenter): We've based our story in the reality of every village, that is, the issue of abuse. The story is about a well constituted family that, when the father becomes unemployed, he starts to drink and then the trouble begins. {Commenting, before playing the drama to the audience, on the reasons behind their choice of topic} (ChuADrP, P1)

There is no reason not to believe the correspondence between the everyday life events of Chupaca's adolescents and the story that appears in the drama<sup>10</sup>. On the contrary, pictures of the family entangled in mixtures of abuse and overprotection densely populate the dramas. The stories told in the dramas and the discussions that sprang from them intensely problematise the relationship of communication between the family and the adolescents. Problems in this relation seem to be, according to the adolescents, a very important feature of family life. The adolescents certainly enact and question

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<sup>10</sup> In 11 out of the 16 dramas included for the empirical analysis sexuality, the adolescents explicitly stated that they were basing their story on a real-life event. Real-life situations were the main source of inspiration for the adolescents. Further, the cases played in the drama were very much inspired by the life events of the adolescents belonging to the clubs. A passage from one discussion depicts the issue eloquently:

Farabundo (from the audience): Was it a real case or was it just a performance?

Jorge (presenter): As I've said earlier, this case can be anyone's case. It can be my case or of any of us. Sadly it is something that did happen to me, at least in part. But what we want is to reach all of you, trying very hard. This is why we've made this drama. (LaVADrQ, Q1)

relationships of neglect and abuse. However, they also do so within relationships of care and protection.

In the coming sections, I will narrow my focus of attention to one central point that emerged from the analysis. I will look into the ways in which the adolescents have enacted and problematised *the family as a key network of communication that engages with the adolescents in relationships of care and support as much as relationships of neglect and abuse*. My interest here, having briefly illustrated the vividness with which the adolescents conceive family relationships, is to explore in detail the ways in which relationships of *care* (and at times over care) and *neglect* (and at times abuse) are metabolised and articulated by the adolescents. I will try to tease out what are the aspects that distinguish and differentiate these two types of relations as much as what similarities arise between them.

### **II.1.2 Who cares? Stories of family support and neglect**

Jorge (presenter): This has been our drama. The only thing I'd like to remind everyone is that it is best to have a united family because without it we're nothing. We destroy ourselves. Ok?  
{Reflecting on the story, immediately after playing the drama}  
(LaVADrP, P3)

Jorge, after having presented a video drama enacting a story of family turbulence very similar to the one played out by Eulogia and her family, eloquently spells out the centrality of the family. According to him, without the family we get destroyed, we simply are nothing. Jorge however, does not make reference to any kind of family but to a united family. With his cry, he shifts the attention away from the family as an institution, to the family as an open project, one that demands the challenging task of reaching agreement, of unity. Jorge seems to have outlined a fascinating enterprise. On the one hand, he spells out the fundamental and necessary role of the family plays the lives

of the adolescents; on the other hand, he places the family as in need of unity, for it to be in a position to deliver. So the adolescents, as family members, become part of the enterprise of achieving this unity.

It is within this circuit of necessary exchange that we will be looking at how the adolescents enact and problematise the issue of the family caring for or neglecting them. As an initial step in this exploration, I will delve into what conceptualisations of relationships of care arise from the dramas and discussions. In this respect, an important clue is given by Alejandra during a discussion on the pressing issue of adolescent pregnancy:

Alejandra (presenter): and why are we going to address the issue of adolescent mothers? First, because it is something that happens almost everywhere in the world. There are young people who do not have good communication with their parents. And because of this, they lack confidence, they don't talk about sexuality, about these things. And this is why girls get pregnant. {Reflecting, immediately before playing the drama, on the topic chosen for the story} (CorLDrP, P1)

According to Alejandra, communication appears as the lifeblood of a caring relationship between the adolescent and the family. Further, she seems to articulate an idea of communication that goes well beyond the simple 'telling of things'. Rather, she establishes a conceptual link between communication and confidence. Communication with the family is understood as necessary as much as generative; communication and confidence seem to feed and promote each other. From Alejandra's words, we deduce that once there is confidence and communication between parents and children then, sensitive issues like sex can enter the conversation flow. Further, the mutually reinforcing effect between communication and confidence seems to invest the talk on sex with a strength that, according to Alejandra, makes a big difference in the adolescent girls' lives: without it, girls risk getting pregnant.

Two aspects that appear in the passage by Alejandra seem to be important. First, and in direct agreement with Jorge, she singles out the family as a fundamental player in the adolescent quest for coping with the world, in her example, in their dealing with the risk of getting pregnant. Second, she seems to put on hold the potential encapsulated in the family and to subject it to there being communication between it and the adolescents. It is not just the family that is important to the adolescent; it is the family that manages to communicate successfully that makes the difference. A strong *association of care and communication* arises from Alejandra's words.

The delights and pains of a successful (or failed) relationship of communication and confidence between parents and adolescents appears as an issue that strongly captures their attention. The path from the identification of what communication entails to the accomplishment of an actual communicative relationship seems to be riddled with obstacles, some of them, apparently, insurmountably large. Let us look at this aspect in detail.

One type of distortion in communication between families and adolescents singled out in the dramas is that of unequal treatment between children. To illustrate this issue I will rely on an example elaborated by the adolescents of the community of Callao, who made this key point a central theme for their drama. They enacted the stories and fates of two brothers, Marcos and Junior, who were treated unequally by their parents. Let us have look at a scene of this drama.

*Marcos is at home watching TV and Junior comes out of his bedroom.*

Junior: Good morning mum. And my breakfast?!! *Junior walks to the table where Marcos is sitting and, without greeting Marcos, starts watching the football on TV with him. The mother arrives with breakfast for Junior.*

Mother: Here's your breakfast sweetie. *She caresses him.*

Junior: Thanks mum. Ah mum, today's the party, remember?

Mother: Yes, and who are you going with?

Junior: With Marcos and some friends from the neighbourhood.

Marcos: Mum, and my breakfast? You got him his.



Mother: you're too lazy. Go and get yours.

Marcos: But you got him his breakfast...

Mother: Just stop complaining. *She walks away.*

Marcos *banging the hand against the table*: Fuck it! *Addressing Junior* What?!?

Junior: What?

Marcos: Are you happy now?!? You get it and I don't. Fuck it!  
(CalLDr, 3'30")

A petty discussion over breakfast serves to illustrate the inequality in the relationship between Marcos and Junior, and their mother. This inequality seems to brew discontent and distress. Further, inequality appears at the root of very negative consequences for the person suffering it, i.e. Marcos. In the drama, the suffering Marcos feels from his family's neglect is canalised as frustration, which leads him to a troubled relationship with a girl that results in his death. This issue of unequal treatment between brothers arose further problematisation among the adolescents,

Oscar (presenter): A question for you. Do you think that this family is acting correctly by over-protecting the younger son while giving the elder son more freedom?

Lisa (audience): I think that this family is not acting correctly because 'a son is a son' and they should be treated in the same way.

Oscar (presenter): Well, but in every family children are not the same. All families have preferences for one child, either because it is the first child or the youngest one; so not all of them get as much affection as they need, innit? {Pausing the video to debate with the audience on an aspect of the story} (CalLDrP, P4)

The exchange raises three interesting points. On the one hand, Lisa points out the wrongness inherent in the differential treatment and proposes instead a principle of equal relationships. On the other hand, two issues seem to arise from Oscar's statement. First, that unequal treatment is a common practice in family life. Second, and more importantly, that inequality can be seen as an almost natural aspect of family life. Oscar seems to be allowing justification for the possibility of inequality, while Lisa contests it boldly. Whatever the stance is, inequality appears as something pervasive.

Another major distortion to communication, as singled out by the young men and women in the dramas, is gender. Gender inequalities in the relationship between parents and adolescents do not go unnoticed or un-scrutinised:

*The family, dad, mum, two daughters and a son are sitting around the table having dinner.*

Rafa (son): I wanted to ask for permission to go out on Saturday.

Serafín (father): On Saturday?

Rafa: To go to a party ... with my friends.

Serafín: With your friends. And how are doing with your school grades?

Rafa: But you already know that dad, I'm a good student.

Serafín: And what about maths?

Rafa: Good.

Serafín: And your grades in math? What's your latest grade?

Rafa: 15.

Serafín: 15? Congratulations my son. *Silence.*

Jiuliana (daughter): Dad the two of us also wanted to ask for permission to go to the party?

Serafín: Another one!?!

Jiuliana: Yeeeeees

Serafín: A party; and are you expecting me to allow you to go?

Wendy (daughter): Yes dad please, don't be mean. We want to go too.

Serafín: The two of you? There's no question about it. You're girls and you're not allowed to go.

(LaVADr, 3'20'')

While Rafa appears to have cut a good deal with his father, Wendy and Jiuliana are left stranded with no party. At a closer look however, the exchanges tell plenty more than just a story of a binary yes/no. Rafa's request for permission is met by Serafín with an aseptic response. More 'factual' information is needed. Once Rafa provides a detailed account of his plans, Serafín initiates a bargaining exercise and asks after Rafa's grades at school. Rafa, skilfully, does not disclose the facts straightaway but replies with a self-praise line "But you already know that dad, I'm a good student". Serafín however, recalls his son attention towards the request for 'hard' information. Rafa delays his answer with a vague "Good", at which point Serafín demands

the exact grade. Rafa finally discloses the grade generating the closure of the bargaining process with an authorisation by Serafín, issued in the form of a compliment to his son. Wendy's and Jiuliana's attempt on the other hand, seems to run through a completely different path. After a pause, Jiuliana puts forward her own request, gently. Serafín's reaction is again inquisitive: "Another one!?" This time however, we are not in a position to ascertain if it is another party or another request (Rafa's being the first one) or another request by the daughters (they might have made the same request in the past). Whatever interpretation is given to the response 'another one' the flow of the conversation seems unequivocal. There's no authorisation for Jiuliana and Wendy. Moreover, the grounds of the rejection are clear: they are women hence, no party for them.

The colourful family event craftily elaborated and performed by the adolescents proves very telling with regards to the dynamics underpinning the gender inequalities when it comes to relationship of care between parents and adolescents. Underneath the yes and no imparted by Serafín there seem to be two different processes of communication. In the father-son talk, Serafín's authorisation appears subjected to the fulfilment of certain conditions by Rafa (i.e. getting good grades at school). It is proper for Rafa to go to the party; however, Serafín demands that, within this framework of propriety, Rafa meets certain requirements in his performance at school. On the other hand, the father-daughters conversation does not seem to give any indication of there ever being a horizon of agreement at the disposal of the girls in dialogue. It is altogether improper that Jiuliana and Wendy go to the party.

Moving away from the gender differences in the way this family or rather this father communicates with his son and daughters, there is another aspect lying beneath these differences, which is shared by two apparently unequal relations. In both situations there seems to be no scope to discuss the rightness

or wrongness of the matters at stake. In both situations the father is in charge of determining the normative framework for the dialogue. Rafa benefits from the framework laid down for him by Serafín; it allows him room to negotiate for permission to go to the party. The way in which he paces his response -the staggered and roundabout way in which he discloses his good grades in maths- tells us that he is eager to make the best out of the possibility opened to him, probably aware that if he misses it he will not be in a position to 're-negotiate' the situation. For Jiuliana and Wendy the normative framework laid down by the father does not allow any space for negotiation. It is categorical: as women, they are not allowed to go to parties. So although the frameworks are different for boys and for girls, neither one allows space for reaching consensus -the father always has the final say. But let us look at what happens when this normative framework is challenged.

*Helio, an adolescent boy, arrives home with a bottle of beer in his hand. He is completely drunk.*

Helio: I get back home. My parents don't understand me. I've got problems at home; that's why I drink.

*Helio's father, Esaú, arrives to the house.*

Helio addressing the man: Dad

Father: Son! What have you done? Have you been drinking? How could you do that? And at home?!

Helio: Dad, you don't understand me. I'm sick of you: all day at work. Work! Work!

Father: I've got a job, you know! That's why I can support you!

Helio: I'm sick of you. I have problems and you don't understand me. Fuck!

Father: You can't treat me in this way. I'm your father.

Helio: You?!

Father: I work my ass off all day in order to support you!!

Helio: No. You prefer work to your children.

Father: You have no right to make these demands.

*Father begins to take off his belt.*

Helio: Dad! Dad! I'm sick of you beating me! This has to stop now!!! *Helio, very drunk, falls on his knees before his father.* Dad, please stop and reflect! Families need that parents understand their children! Please; do you understand?! (LaVADr, Intro<sup>11</sup>)

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<sup>11</sup> Although this quotation comes from a drama, it does not have a time index. The reason for it is that the adolescents of La Victoria, the creators of the drama, performed live the

Here we see a son's eagerness to express his feelings of neglect to his father. Helio believes that his father's work is the cause of this neglect, and proposes that this generates misunderstanding and distress, which lead Helio to alcohol. In a short statement weaving together key social categories, Helio lays bare a fundamental dynamic at the base of family life. On the other hand, Helio's father, Esaú, contests this argument on a two fronts: on a factual basis, and on normative grounds. At the level of the facts, Esaú raises a defence of his time spent at work on the grounds that he works precisely *to support* his son. This not only justifies his time at work but, more importantly, connects it directly to Helio's well being. This factual clarification opens up a deeper gap with respect to the possibility of a shared understanding on the notions of support and neglect. Where Esaú sees support, Helio sees neglect. The hours spent at work mean to Esaú some kind of 'investment in care' while for Helio they represent a 'withdrawal of attention'.

Second, Esaú moves the dispute into normative terms. He admonishes his son for making an illegitimate claim: sons are not entitled to treat fathers the way Helio has. Moreover, Esaú's feelings are deeply hurt by Helio's words, which lead him to a state of sheer anger. The combination of fury, outrage at the lack of reverence showed by Helio, and misunderstanding about terms of care, carries Esaú to physical violence. He takes off his belt ready to physically reprimand Helio.

The enactment of an instance of problematisation of neglect as that performed by Helio and Esaú provides a colourful illustration of a point made consistently throughout the dramas. The misunderstandings at the root of problems of care and neglect are multiple and tightly knitted to one another. First, as illustrated by the examples of Marcos and Junior, and of Rafa and his

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introduction to the story in the occasion of the presentation of the drama in one of the workshops.

sisters, care and neglect seem to be unequally distributed. Unequal care is an issue that concerned the adolescents, although as we have seen in Oscar's statement, inequality may have a quasi-natural origin. Second, the adolescents' problematisations of relationships of care indicates that there is little agreement on what constitutes care. While for Alejandra and Helio care appears related to communication and understanding, for Esaú care means something else. But probably, the most controversial issue brought forward by the adolescents both in the dramas and in the discussions is the problematic nature of the overall normative framework within which communication altogether takes place.

As illustrated in the case of Rafa and his sisters, although it is clear that there are two different communications at stake, the father always dominated the normative framework. Moreover, the framework was not part of the communication process at all; it was beyond the realm of the challengeable. In contrast, Helio does attempt to challenge the normative framework laid by his father (probably helped by his drunkenness). The consequences, as we saw, were tragic: yet another wave of abuse. A connection begins to appear between, on one hand, the misunderstanding between family and adolescents on the 'factual' meaning of a caring relationship, and on the other hand, the near-impossibility of expanding the communication space to allow adolescents access to the normative framework within which family communication takes place. The very space needed for attempting to clarify terms of factual misunderstanding seems to be closed off by an inflexible set of normative conditions; a normative rigidity that seems to collapse communication between adolescents and their parents. The 'redrafting' of these conditions appears at the heart of the ideal model of the communicative family imagined by the adolescents. Let us look at it.

### II.1.3 The imagined family: stories of questions and answers

Alejandra (presenter): It's about the lack of communication. Some times, parents pay more attention to their clothes than to their children. They say that education is the most important thing but they don't give them the love, affection and trust that we should all get as young people. Some times parents say 'I have confidence in my child, she is an excellent student'. But even the best students get pregnant because they lack confidence and communication. Their parents can't talk to them about it because they think it is something negative or that their daughters won't do that. But this is not really the case. {Reflecting, before playing the drama to the audience, on one of the issues addressed in the drama} (CorLDrP, P1)

Alejandra disputes the 'commodification' of the terms of care and proposes that a misunderstanding with respect to care on the part of the family has serious consequences on the adolescents. As she puts it, their well-being is affected by the extent of communication between them and their parents. The family acts as a central agent in the process of learning about the world that the adolescents are engaged in; families are key communication networks. As such, care becomes a fundamentally social term. Understood in this way, the overall enterprise of family support revolves around 'social time' and communication. Alejandra, as much as Helio, contests the understanding of care that gets equated to the giving of things. Their objection to their parents could be summarised as follows: 'you are very important to us, we have a wealth of dependence on you, it is you that we need because it is *through* you that we become'. Failure to understand this has, in the eyes of the adolescents, fundamental negative consequences:

Antonio (presenter): When Pamela began her third year at secondary school she had to find new friends. And why is this? Because her parents were going through economic difficulties, which made them neglect her; they wouldn't give her the attention they used to. So Pamela went looking for new friends and these friends took her down the wrong path. {Pausing the video -on a 'white screen' deliberately added to the film- to

comment on circumstances surrounding the main character's life} (HuaLDrP, P1)

According to Alejandra it is about communication; following Helio, it is understanding; in Antonio's terms, it's attention. The attempts to lay down the terms of what a caring relationship should be, point towards a conceptualisation of care based on interaction. More importantly, in bringing to the fore the *social element* of the relation, two operations are at stake. First, it is the family members as subjects, as agents, that are called to take part. Second, as a social relationship among agents, caring should allow for open flow of exchange among partners in interaction.

Brunildo (audience): What way do you think parents should communicate with their children? I mean, we experience this all the time, but how would you like to be treated by your parents, following the movie that we've just watched?

Malu (presenter): Well, above all I'd say that it should be by asking us questions. I mean, a parent should not aim to be just a parent but a friend or a brother of each of us.

Jorge (presenter): I think parents, like us, should allow time for everything: time to talk with your parents, time to talk with your children, time to talk to your friends, time for fun, for lots of things. It's about keeping everything in a state of equilibrium. If things go wrong with one of us everything gets destroyed.  
(Applauses) (LaVADrQ, Q3)

The imaginary drafting of what an ideal family would be appears here in full force. As a network of communication, the roles of the partners in the communicative process seem to cross-metamorphose. The boundary between father and son opens up. The relationship almost dissolves into talk, into a process of questions and answers, into mutual empathy. Equality expands not just between siblings, but also between parents and children; or in the words of Jorge, it is a matter of total "equilibrium".



#### **II.1.4 The family as a network of communication: between unity and constriction**

As a network of communication, the centrality of the family attains an indisputable position in the lives of the adolescents. There is a wealth to gain from the family, they seem to be telling us. But this gain is not an automatic one, sprouting spontaneously from the institution of the family. Instead, it is a gain that comes from the family understood as a project that demands the unity of its members. In turn, this unity demands understanding among the family members.

A united family is in a position to generate caring relationships that will benefit all parties. But, the benefits of a caring, united family demand a crucial element, according to the adolescents: communication. The case for a communicating family, for the family as an open network of communication was at length enacted and talked about in the dramas and discussions. The obstacles to open communication seem to be lying within the tightness of the normative frameworks that underpin the very processes of communication, and deprive them from the potential benefits that open dialogue seems to yield: a family that asks and listens rather, than one that commands and constricts. The drafting of sketches and outlines for a communicative, united and caring family captivated the attention and creativity of the adolescents.

More often than not however, the difficulties in the quest for a truly communicating family become insurmountable and the adolescents lose out in their relationship with their families. The family, as the prime agent of socialisation, as a key network of communication, collapses from within its rigid structures. This however, does not mean that the adolescents are left to their own devices. Working side by side, at times in collaboration, at times in competition with the family there is another, very powerful network of

communication, the peers, which is the object of analysis of the coming section.

## **II.2 Chibolas, compadres, patas and cuerazos: the adolescents and their peers**

The analysis of the workings of the peers as a prime communication network in the life of the adolescents has been divided into three sections. In the first section (II.2.1), I will frame the broad terms within which the adolescents enacted and problematised the issue of the flow of communication among peers. Subsequently, I will discuss details of the workings of the peers as a network of communication; I will concentrate my attention on the issue of advice and normative openness with respect to these processes of communication (II.2.2). Lastly, I provide a conceptual summary of the main points discussed on the issue of peers as a communication network (II.2.3).

### **II.2.1 'Let me tell you something' - Introducing peers as networks of communication.**

Ernesto (presenter): Synthia lived with her aunt, who abused her. She was mean to Synthia, she'd even deprive her of food or prevent her from going to school. So Synthia [who had become pregnant] was sure that her aunt would kick her out of the house. I mean, her life was at risk; she wouldn't have where to go. So, with all these fears she decides to see a doctor, who'd carry out an abortion. And it's due to this abortion that she starts to feel bad, she has a haemorrhage and dies. So, Diana, the friend who took her down the wrong path, regrets all what has happened. It is her fault that Synthia has died. And now Diana realises how much she misses her friend Synthia. She'd given Diana advice, she'd told her to get out of bad things, to study ... But Diana never paid attention to her and only when Synthia's dead, she feels regretful. So she carried flowers to Synthia's grave. {Pausing the video to add commentary on the relationship between two characters of the story -Synthia and Diana} (ArtADrP, P6)

In this passage, Ernesto recapitulates the story told in the drama produced by the adolescents of his community. According to Ernesto, the tragic story of Synthia has its roots in two types of failed relationships: one of neglect and abuse suffered at home, and another of wrongdoing, related to her friend Diana. This unfortunate combination, Ernesto tells us, has deeply and terribly affected Synthia, leading to her death. With respect to her relationship with the family, in this case an aunt with whom she lived, things looked tremendously difficult. Her aunt would have never understood, let alone sympathised with, a pregnant niece. Pregnancy was not an option for Synthia. Communication between her and her aunt, Ernesto tells us, was framed within an extreme case of neglect, abuse and crystallised misunderstanding. But, what about the relationship between Synthia and Diana?

Ernesto stops to review the role played by Diana in this tragedy. Diana was Synthia's friend. Further, she is responsible for leading Synthia to a path of contravention. Her responsibility is immense. First, Synthia was a vulnerable subject, neglected at home, and needy of company and care. Second, she was a good person, who gave Diana sound advice (although Diana apparently never followed it). Diana's burden, therefore, is enormous and she feels it deeply: she has lost a friend, whose death she herself has contributed to. In an act of repentance, Diana expresses and exercises her remorse taking flowers to Synthia's grave. (Let us go and see what this scene looked like *in* the drama.)

*Outdoors. Closeup of bunch of flowers that Diana has in her hand.*

*Diana, very sad, and reflecting in aloud: She was feeling bad because of the abortion. I am here, feeling bad because she's died. Now, I don't have a friend to be with.*

*Diana gets on her knees, looking towards the floor: My dear friend, from heaven, please help all young people so that they don't fall into vice. From here I'll try to keep all young people away from vice so that they don't do what I've done ... Thank you, it is because of you that I'm not with bad friends anymore.*

*Closeup showing a grave and shrine; it reads 'Synthia A. 25.8.98'. Diana continues to reflect aloud, crying as she talks:*

Forgive me. Forgive me for not having listened to you earlier.  
My friend, I miss you. I wish you could be here with me. You  
were everything to me; like the sister that I never had. From  
heaven, please protect the young people. My friend, I miss you.  
*Diana, very distressed, stands up, crosses herself and leaves.*  
(ArtLDr, 20'26")

Ernesto and Diana reflect on a sad story about the death of a friend. It is an instance of crisis. As such, the process seems to open up thoughts and to help make sense of what is going on. In this vein, if we attempt for an instance to abstract from the gloom of the events and turn our attention towards the various kinds of reflections that emerge from this crisis, we find that there is a universe of processes at stake underpinning the relationship between Diana and Synthia. Diana's and Ernesto's words are reflections about communication among peers, about the many shades, the causes and the consequences of these relationships of communication. We learn from them the ways they acknowledge the transcendence of the relationship of interdependence between friends; the angles from which they problematise the array of implications stemming from the exercise of influence among peers; the kinds of conclusions they sketch from these reflections. In short, the two passages quoted above give us a strong indication not only of the intensity and tension with which peers as central networks of communications were enacted by the adolescents, but and probably more importantly, of the depth with which these networks were thematised, reflected upon, drafted and redrafted in conversation and discussion.

Peers as networks of communication will occupy centre stage in the sections that follow. I will try to tease out and articulate the many angles and perspectives from which the adolescents addressed the issue of their peers. Following an approach similar to the one applied in the case of the family discussed in the previous sections, this examination of the peers as networks of communication will help to make sense on how communication flows between the adolescents, and how it affects all the parties involved in

communication processes. In short, peers as networks of communication play a central role in the process of individuation and socialisation of the adolescents. As such, the coming sections will constitute an excursion into the ways they themselves make sense and metabolise this fundamental social process.

## II.2.2 'Watch out!' Enacting and problematising communication among peers

### *Boys with boys with girls with girls*

There is a first dimension that comes to the fore as soon as we delve into the characterisation and problematisation of peers as networks of communication: the difference in the ways these network operate and are reflected on, depending on their gender composition. Networks of boys and networks of girls differ. Further, mixed networks differ from both of these. But, let us begin by looking into the workings of the single-gender networks,

*In the party; a group of boys is chatting and pushing each other.  
Everyone is harassing Marcos, goading him on to go for Juliana.*

Group: Go boy go! Come on, go boy go!  
(CalLDr, 10'10")

*The group of girls is addressing the same issue with Juliana.*

Cecilia: Hey, is he coming on to you?

Juliana: Yeah, yeah. Looks like I've pulled tonight.

Girls: Wooh! Good, well done. Yeah, you've done well.

Cecilia: His friends are a bit of all right, no?

Juliana: If you want I can set up something with his friends so you can have a good time too.

Girls: Yeah, yeah.

Juliana: You do your part, I'll do mine.

Girls: It's cool with us.

(CalLDr, 10'27")

*The group of boys in the party is still harassing Marcos, egging him on –and there he goes.*

Marcos: What's happening?

Boys: Come on, go for it, you'll get her. Just go for it. That's it man, go for her; go for her. Come on mate, go get her!  
(CalLDr, 10'35")

The three segments above correspond to three consecutive shots lasting in total just over 25 seconds<sup>12</sup>. Something seems to be going on between Marcos and Juliana at this party. On Marcos' side a group of boys is goading and harassing him, cajoling him into action. On Juliana's side the girls are making carefully thought-out plans to arrange a collective 'pull' of boys, probably the ones who are thuggishly teasing Marcos. As the camera goes from one group to the other we get a vivid picture of the radically different discussion of the situation that girls and boys experience. On the boys' corner, physical contact, loud voices, cries for victory, and plenty of noise. On the girls' corner, a striking flow of coordinated tasks, speedily and consensually designed and allocated.

As these cross snapshots of a pick up story illustrate, a sea of difference seem to separate boys talking to boys from girls talking to girls. These differences seem to point to a myriad of assorted directions. There is one aspect of these differences however, that most captivated the attention of the adolescents. While boys' communication networks appear characterised as *means-to-ends networks*, girls' are enacted as *agreement-driven networks*. This seems to be an important and complex difference. In the illustration above, for example, the imperative of success that appears hanging over Marcos and his crowd contrasts nicely with the calm concurrence that orients Juliana and her friends. Success-driven and consent-driven networks unfold in different ways and, more importantly, raise different concerns. In networks of boys there are two key issues at stake: determining the terms of the confrontation, and establishing winners and losers. These two tasks require skills and ability, more importantly, they demand that the basic principle, the will to win, be clear in the mind of the competitors.

*Outdoors. Helio and Paolo, leaning against a wall, are having a conversation.*

Paolo: Mate, Elizabeth fancies you.

Helio: bullshit.

Paolo: I wouldn't let the opportunity go.

Helio: Well, who knows ...

Paolo: And you know the girl from around the corner, what's her name?

Helio: Yeah, my neighbour.

Paolo: She's also after you, and she's really dishy. Man, if I were you I wouldn't let it go.

Helio: Don't worry mate. Who do you want me to start with? Who do I get first? You choose.

Paolo: No man, you're a gangster, you've got to choose.

Helio: That's fine. But who am I going to *begin by*?

Paolo: You'll do both, but you begin with her.

Helio: With Jackie you mean.

Paolo: Yeah

Helio: I'll snog her. What's the bet?

Paolo: Half a box

Helio: Half a box of beer man. Fuck man, I'll pull her straight away. *They 'shake hands' by linking each other's pinkie fingers in agreement.*

Paolo: But if you try to fool me mate you're fucked. I get the gang to beat you up.

Helio: Don't fuck around with me mate.

(LaVADr, 19'21")

On the girls' networks side, the bedrock of consent on which they operate does not seem to make life easier for them. Girls talking to girls appear portrayed on the one hand, as being able to enjoy a much wider space for dialogue. However, the space enabled by this dialogue demands a non-indifferent, argumentative sharpness on the part of the participants in the network.

*In a party, a group of girls is talking.*

Vicky: Why aren't they inviting us to dance? What a bunch of fools!

Sofía: They are not inviting us to dance.

*Romina joins the group of girls.*

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<sup>12</sup> The total length can be checked by looking at the time indexed in the reference code codes of the three quotations.

Romina: Hey girls, have you seen the stunning boy that just arrived?

Girls: Which one? Which one?

Romina *pointing towards the group of boys*: That one over there; the one wearing an earring. *Camera goes towards the boys and focuses on Santiago.*

Alejandra: come on girls! Stop looking that he's gonna notice it!

Romina: no way, he's only just arrived.

Alejandra: Whatever...

Vicky: He's stunning, isn't he?!

Romina *addressing Alejandra*: Don't tell me you don't find him attractive.

Clarisa *with a face of little enthusiasm*: Well yeah, he's kind of all right.

(ElCLDr, 2'15")

The two passages above portray ordinary scenes of boys talking to boys about girls, and girls talking to girls about boys. In the case of Helio and Paolo, there is a contest over Elizabeth; on the other hand, Sofía and her friends spin and weave around Santiago. Helio and Paolo appear both bound and blinded by the imperative of conquering Elizabeth. There seems to be an over-riding quest for success that takes precedence over the events, a kind of supremacy of instrumentality that hinders communication in one of its most precious qualities: the possibility of shaping reality. For Helio and Paolo reality appears already shaped; moreover, the shape takes the form of a battle.

For Sofía and her friends the arena looks different, nevertheless not altogether opposite to Helio and Paolo's. Santiago is good looking and has captivated the girls' attention. To an extent Santiago is as much a prize as Elizabeth. Probably he's a dearest prize as implied by the feeling of almost uncontrollable attraction that runs across this group of girls. So, if this is the case, can we then talk about Elizabeth and Santiago as two just examples of the same type of contest? No. First, the case of Sofía and her friends illustrates powerfully the array of diverse angles from which the girls deal with the 'issue of Santiago'. Further, these perspectives intersect with each other in an attitude that demands mutual acknowledgement by the participants in the



dialogue. Santiago is a *matter to be addressed* and not just a prize to be won. Probably, the one handling the matter best will also end up winning the prize. At the heart of this contest however, there brews a fundamental instance of deliberation, one that may yield good as much as bad, that is open to be exercised by debaters as much as hijacked by connivers; an instance of deliberation that, in short, although not in a position to guarantee any superior outcome, allows the girls participating in it the opportunity (and the practice) to shape reality that is not present among boys striving for success.

Boys' networks of communication differ from girls'; their structural characteristics are different, the rules are different, their dynamics are different. The adolescents enacted countless instances of characterisations of boys' networks and girls networks like the ones reported above; further they problematised the workings and implications of the networks both within the dramas and during the discussions about the dramas. However, and surprisingly, it appears that there were no relevant attempts to cross-characterise, or cross-problematise the networks. Put simply, discussions never moved away from arguing within the boundaries of a network. For example, boys and girls pointed out and questioned the overtly instrumental trait of boys' networks of communication. However, this was done within the logic of boys' networks and never, in reflexive contrast from within the logic of the girls' networks; that is, scrutinising instrumentality with the language of debate and agreement, with which girls' networks of communication were portrayed. The networks were never reflexively put against each other, although they were thoroughly problematised from within each one.

#### *Advice & recommendations for girls and boys*

Although there seem to be considerable differences in the networks of communication of boys and of girls, there is a key trait that runs across them, showing a logic of its own, apparently not dependant on the composition of

the network that enacts it. *Peers are portrayed and problematised as source and recipients of advice and recommendations.*

As already hinted in the previous section (II.2.1) by the passages illustrating Synthia's tragedy, the adolescents paid particular attention to the flow of guidance that circulates among them. Recommendations are given to others upon request or spontaneously; they are sought in instances of crisis but also exchanged in everyday life situations. Advice takes many different shapes, depending of a variety of factors. At times, recommendations are harshly contested; at times they are meekly followed. As we saw in the case of Synthia and Diana, sometimes they may be altogether ignored. Whatever its form, causes and consequences, the flow of advice among the adolescents is a key aspect of the communication network that they themselves constitute. Let us now look at an illustration of the enactment of communication of advice.

*Damián is back playing snooker with his mates, who are hassling him because he's out of it.*

Boys: Hey what's up? What have you done man? *They stop playing and all surround Damián.*

Damián: I'm in trouble, man. I can't believe what's happened to me. Remember the party?

Group: Yeah, yeah, the party.

Damián: Well, with Wendy what had to happen happened ... and now she's telling me that she's pregnant.

Group: What!! You're joking!!

Damián: No, no. I'm not joking.

Group all speaking at the same time: She has to keep it ... She has to get rid of it.

*Silence.*

Group: And what are you going to do?

Damián: Don't know.

Aníbal: You'll have to go out and work mate.

Bocha: And do your parents know?

Damián: They don't. They'd kill me if they found out.

Coco who has already said no with his head at the idea of having the baby: I have an idea, I have an idea.

Group: Let's hear it, come on.

Coco: What about if you tell your parents that what happened to you happened to a friend of yours. So that you can check the way they react and you can decide whether to tell them or not.

Damián: But if they find out ... they'll kill me man.

Bocha: But how do you expect your dad to react?

Damián: Horribly man, you know him.

Bocha *buying into the Coco's idea*: so just go and tell him, but as if it happened to a friend of yours.

Group *assenting*: Yes man, and check out how he takes it.

*Long silence.*

Bocha: So, what do you think? *Damián pulls a very worried and uncertain face, Bocha carries on speaking.* Well, you've got to think it carefully mate. Or you'll bear the consequences...

Damián: But I'm at school man!!!.

Bocha *losing interest in the topic*: We'll have to figure out something ... *Long silence. The group starts looking bothered by the entire situation. Damián walks away.*

Group: Hey are you leaving?

Damián: And what do you want me to do? *He leaves.*

(LaVLDr, 18'08")

This long passage provides us with a sound illustration of the enactment of advice. In this case, it is advice among boys, and is contradictory and fragmented, almost directed 'at' Damián rather than shared 'with' Damián. Damián seems to be too overwhelmed by the situation and leaves (Although we learn later in the drama that he did take up Coco's advice and spoke to his father narrating the events as if they pertained to a friend and not to him). Instances of communication of advice, like the one enacted by Damián and his friends, prove to be very telling with respect to the signification that these acts have for the adolescents. Advice tends to appear at crossroads particularly, at moments in which decisions, often very important ones, have to be taken. In these situations, the adolescents appear drawing on each other to gather resources that will help them face and attempt to solve particular problems. Thus, advice is very important, almost an institution circulating among peers, as is evidenced again in the discussion following other presentations:

Pippo (audience): And so what would you do to prevent these cases of drug addiction?

Oscar (presenter): The only thing we can do is to give him advice, some support. We can't do much more; you know how

drugs are. There are drugs everywhere. With very little money you can buy some. So the only thing we can do is to help him, to keep him company; because it's like with cigarettes, you need will power to quit and carry on going about life, as you were just having a beer.  
(CalADrQ, Q1)

Griselda (audience): You've presented a drama on the issue of youth gangs. Now, what would you do about it as a group of adolescents?

Bautista (presenter): Well, as I said earlier on, the only thing we do is to give advice and to support young people. The Club we've got in our neighbourhood brings in kids that already are in gangs and we try to understand them; we help each other, do you know what I mean?  
(ValADrP&Q, Q3)

These two illustrations help us understand not just the enactment in drama of advice but the actual reflections by the adolescents around the issue of advice. Let us look into them. A first significant trait of advice is that it operates as a *communicatively enacted problem solving strategy*. It is work done with words. Advice concentrates within it both the factual instruction and the illocutionary binding force. It is performed utterance and not written sentence, a social act in a position to bring parties together, and hopefully deliver a solution.

Second, advice *circulates* among peers. Sought or volunteered, given or taken, followed or ignored, advice is a marker of the network of communication made up of peers. Its communicative constitution allows advice to move through the networks, energising them; at times, advice gives the networks a very 'raison d'être': peers, as central networks of communication, attain this relevance because of their capacity to generate and allow for the circulation of advice.

A third trait of advice, as characterised and problematised by the adolescents, is given by its *boundaries and limitations*, which are crucial. First, there are

boundaries placed within advice itself. Recommendations, according to the adolescents, may have an impact, may deliver, but this is neither guaranteed nor sufficient. Second, and more importantly, the fundamental limits of a piece of advice lie outside the advice, and within the recipient of it. Advice is understood as provision of support with no obligation to comply. Its power is rather, of an argumentative nature.

Understood as an argumentative force circulating communicatively among networks of peers that generate it, advice acquires a huge level of significance. It is communication that has the tremendous appeal of being produced from within the network and moreover, of being deprived of compulsory power. Advice is trebly open: it is open at the point of creation, open at the point of justification, and open at the point of application. It has a fluidity that invests it as the most salient communicative form in circulation among the adolescents. Let us move forward now and inspect in more detail the instances of communication of advice.

It is no coincidence that most of the advice generated and communicated through the networks of peers revolves around solving problems with respect to the other main network of communication, the family. As discussed in sections II.1.2 to II.1.4 above, a salient obstacle of the family as a communicative network is its normative rigidity. Issues that involve disagreement with respect to the legitimacy of an argument appear beyond reach for the adolescents. As the reader may recall, Wendy and Jiuliana stood no chance in arguing with their father about his decision not to allow them to go to the party on the grounds of them being women. Further, Helio became yet again the victim of physical abuse when he attempted to challenge what he conceived as illegitimate acts of neglect by his father. This constrictive character of the family has its flipside in the occurrence of advice among peers. And it is precisely those instances of normative closure that will become the targets of deliberative advice.

*Street scene. A group of girls is hanging out, chatting. Wendy and Jiuliana arrive and join in.*

Wendy and Jiuliana, arriving into the group: Hi girls...

Group: Hello, hello.

Susanita addressing the newly arrived: Hey girls, you are coming to the party, aren't you? You can't let us down.

Wendy and Jiuliana: Well no, we aren't coming.

Susanita: Come on! You have to come.

Group, expressing disappointment: Yeaaaa, you have to come.

Susanita: You can't miss it!!

Jiuliana: As usual, my dad's not allowing us to go.

Mafalda: He can't treat you like this!!

Susanita: Come on, you've got to go anyway. Don't forget that Damián will be there.

Mafalda: And Cesar ... and they'll end up with other girls. So you don't want to miss out on this one.

Savannah: We'll help you out girls. And if you sneak out of the house?

(LaVLDr, 8'05")

*At home, Laura, dressed in 'working clothes', is washing clothes. Someone knocks at the door.*

Laura: And who could it be? *Laura walks to the door and opens it to greet her friend, Camila.*

Laura: Hi.

Camila: Hi, how are you? *As they walk in* what are you up to?

Laura: I'm washing my aunt's clothes.

Camila: What? Why don't you leave them? Wash your own ones only!

Laura: But if I don't wash her clothes she won't feed me.

Camila: Don't be so foolish. If I were you I'd just go out and have fun. Come on, why don't we go to a night club this Saturday?

Laura: I don't think my aunt will let me go.

Camila: But you're telling me that she doesn't even feed you. Are you going to put up with her forever? Don't be a fool!! Let's go out.

Laura: I can't; she won't let me.

Camila: Ok, but give it some thought.

Laura: I will.

Camila: Good. See you later. *Camila leaves.*

(PacADr, 7'50")

We add the case of Laura and her friend Camila to the story of Jiuliana and Wendy, which is familiar by now. Before the actions of a constrictive father

and aunt there stands the deliberative power of collective advice. A first operation that appears in these passages is the possibility allowed, within the peer network, to openly establish the definition of the situation. Facts, norms and feelings are gathered together and put under consideration. Second, the process of scrutiny of the collectively ascertained situation takes place. There, and in a fashion radically opposed to the family network, justification of beliefs is done in the open, from the fun of going to a party, to the people going to the party, to the wrongness of not going to the party. At this point, in the midst of the justification process, advice begins to brew. From within a collectively defined situation, and from collectively (and quite rhetorically) argued points of view, there arise the recommendations, bearing all the strength that collectively validation can endow. Finally, the grounds are laid for the advice given to be applied or not. The application of these instances exceeds the passages quoted, however the non-compelling trait of the advice provided is shown. It will be up to Jiuliana, Wendy and Laura to make up their minds.

The open fluidity of advice circulating among adolescents has the immense appeal of being internally produced and internally validated, as the examples above show. However, the reverse is never the case. To address it, I will go back the case of Sofía and her friends in their contest for Santiago.

*Inside a house. Sofía and Clarisa are having a conversation.*

Sofía: What were you talking about with Santiago?

Clarisa: Nothing serious, we were just getting to know each other.

Sofía: Mmmm, I don't think so....

Clarisa: But, you just don't find anything right, do you? Well, I'll tell you. I'm seeing him tomorrow at the park. He said he wants to talk to me.

Sofía *looking surprised*: And are you going to go?

Clarisa *stating the obvious*: And what do you think?

Sofía: Right. You will go then.

Clarisa: Of course.

Sofía *pulling a face that expresses disagreement*: He's just arrived to the village; you don't know what his intentions are. As the saying goes: 'We see with the face, but eyes don't know'.

Clarisa: You don't know him either, so just shut it.  
(ElCLDr, 5'5")

It is easy to identify this passage as another example of the enactment of conversation between two girls who are problematising communication with boys. It is also easy to identify the accuracy with which Sofía talks about the instrumental, means-to-ends nature of boys' communications. However, things get more complex when it comes to interpreting the dynamics of the advice at stake. In this case, it is volunteered advice that Sofía puts forward. Her recommendation, however, does not make it to the application stage because it gets entangled in the justification instance. Let us look at this point in more detail.

Sofía tries to convince Clarisa not to go to the meeting with Santiago. She bases her claim on the dishonest intentions of Santiago, in the wrongness of Clarisa accepting his invitation, and in Clarisa's inability to understand the situation. Clarisa challenges Sofía by noting that it is not possible to ascertain his intentions; these can only be established by checking Santiago's future actions; it follows, that at present there are no valid (or legitimate) grounds to reject Sanitago's invitation. The open-ended nature of the justification of Sofía's advice has played against her; Clarisa requests that she shut up. Advice has reached such a state of fluidity that it seems to have altogether evaporated.

The volatile nature of advice goes hand in hand with its appeal. This Janus face of recommendations appears in the dramas as much as in the discussion as a dilemma that constantly haunts the adolescents. There does not seem to be an a priori solution to this problem. A commendable attempt to tackle the issue was made by Ernesto during one discussion. He calls for the exercise of care by the adolescents in the choice of friends, but his call takes the form of a fluid recommendation:



Ernesto (presenter): Here we can see that Diana sent Synthia down the wrong path, and now, when Synthia most needs her, Diana turns her back to her Synthia. Diana withdraws her friendship with Synthia. And I say: you must learn how to choose your friends. Friends are those who stick by you in good times and in bad times. That's why I say: learn how to choose your friends. {Pausing the video to add commentary and reflect on the story} (ArtADrP, P4)

### **II.2.3 Peers as a network of communication: risky dialogues**

As a network of communication, running hand in hand with the family, the centrality of peers is of indisputable power in the lives of the adolescents. The boys and girls seem to be telling us from their stories and discussions that, as is the case of the family, there is a wealth to gain from the peers. Again, as with family relations, this gain does not come automatically. Peer networks are embedded in a variety of social dimensions that have to be carefully understood and performed, if one is to benefit from them.

Two main characteristics have emerged from our analysis of the peers as networks of communication. First, that they are not a homogeneous category; boys' networks differ quite substantially from girls' networks. In particular, while the former seem to work under a potent logic of success and instrumentality, the latter appears operating under conditions of well-oiled and astute argumentation. Although from the analysis carried out we have no indication that this structural difference puts any of the networks in a position of advantage, we can derive from the observation of the actual workings of the networks in practice, that girls' networks provide its participants with a sound springboard for developing interactive competence, in particular, the ability to put forward message and get them across. Boys' networks, on the other hand, seem to be ruled more from without than from within, depriving its participants from the scope for shaping the surrounding reality.

A second characteristic emerged from our analysis of the networks of peers, one that cuts across boys' and girls' networks: the issue of advice and recommendations. It emerged from our observations of the adolescents enacting stories and discussing them that there is abundant advice in circulation in the network, advice that is given as much as it is received, volunteered as much as sought. A fundamental aspect seems to both characterise and potentiate the concept of advice flowing through the networks: its openness and fluidity. Its openness allows for collective deliberation of the terms and conditions of the advice in circulation. Its fluidity provides advice with the power to emerge, take shape and reach its point of destination with astonishing precision. On the other hand, the open and fluid nature of the advice circulating through networks of peers, appears to suffer from the very traits that invest it with strength and appeal. Fluid advice, free from any anchors, is subjected to the constant endorsement of every link in the chain, without which it may lose its original power or disintegrate altogether.

Whatever the many shades of peers as networks of communication may be, there is one fundamental aspect that must not be under-considered. The network operates side by side with the other main network, the family. In this respect, and with the goal of making sense of the broader picture, I turn to next section to propose some remarks and reflections with regard to the simultaneous working of peers and family.

### **II.3 Family and Peers: becoming a socialised individual**

#### *Family and peers: between constriction and expansion*

The lengthy excursion on the analysis of the family and peers as the two main networks of communication in the lives the adolescents seems to have yielded very interesting points. Both in the enactment in the dramas of these networks, and in the discussions held after the presentation of the dramas,

issues related to the centrality of the family and of peers as main channels of socialisation and individuation were brought to the fore and problematised time and again.

The adolescents strongly advocated the importance of the family. However, although there is much to gain from it, communication within the family was not conceived as open to debate. The discussion on the misunderstandings around the meanings of care and neglect shows how little can be openly discussed between the adolescents and their families; further it illustrates how the family is seen as an invaluable network that is complex and at times very closed off. Families, in the eyes of the adolescents, seem to be *bad readers* of the opportunities for mutual understanding and growth.

Peers, on the other hand, appear to be a much more fluid network of communication. The fluidity of this network has numerous advantages. For example it offers easily accessible *ammunition for coping*, for facing everyday challenges. The family on the other hand seems to provide more *blueprints for guiding* the adolescents through life. The fluid notion of the peer communication network seems to run into problems at the level of validation. The validation comes from within the peers themselves hence it is likewise fluid. As such, it lends itself to run the same fate as the process of creation of what is being validated. In contrast to the family, peers do not contain a built-in reservoir of 'knowledge' to check on and hence to ground the validation processes. The fluidity of peers as network of communication can be seen as pure empiria; as such it is a risky fluidity.

On the other hand, the family, as a communication network, seems to offer little democratic structure. In consequence, validation resources are not open to validation processes, which undermines its appeal as a validation resource altogether. As spaces for maturation of competence, peer networks of communication appear better placed; they offer more opportunities for open

participation and for the exercise of agency. It could be ventured that peers as communicative networks are more democratic than the family. Nevertheless, both family and peers appear as fundamental networks and both are keenly relevant.

Finally it could be argued that there seems to be a trade-off at stake. On one hand, there is under-regulated reflexivity on the part of the peers, and on the other hand, there is over-regulated reflexivity on the part of the family. Under-regulated reflexivity may turn into genuine 'democratic practice' or it may recede into counter-reflexivity. The instances of giving and taking advice are a good example of the double-sided trait of this process. The over-regulated reflexivity that characterises the family, as a network of communication, may mature into less regulated, more democratic reflexivity or it can be distorted into sheer rejection and non-reflexivity.

*Enacting and problematising family and peers: the development of reflexivity*

So far, the discussion has revolved around the recurrent theme of the networks of communication that act as the central media for the socialisation and individuation of the adolescents. As singled out by them, family and peers constitute such networks. The analysis has attempted to illustrate and explore the workings of these networks. This section focuses on examining the creative process of participation that produced the knowledge that has just been extensively explored.

A first aspect that characterises these processes of production is that they are *grounded in the everyday life environment* of the adolescents, which provides the horizon for thematisation. The stories told in the dramas, as the adolescents themselves took the care to inform their peers about, are largely rooted, inspired and based on events that take place in the communities they live in. Whether a case of domestic violence, or a lively party, it is the situated reality of the people taking part in this process that frames and feeds the stories and

discussions. The adolescents problematising their networks of communication, are doing so *in* the world, but more importantly, to put it in the words of Paulo Freire, *with* the world.

A second feature of these processes is their *collective* character. We could even speak of a double process of collective action. First, there is the collective process of creating and producing a story in the community. Here the adolescents in each of the communities had to agree on and carry out the following, among other things: think of and write up a script, arrange the cast, find locations, decide on dresses, programme times, film all relevant footage, edit, make titles, etc. Second, there is the collective process of presenting and discussing the stories with adolescents of other communities. In the instances of presentation and discussion of dramas, adolescents of all the other communities taking part became the privileged audience for the screening of the dramas.

As these processes take shape, the stories told and the meanings woven cease to be traceable to any specific geographic community, or to any one adolescent or group of adolescents. Rather, they migrate into in the intersubjective space of the collective of adolescents that allows the very emergence of the stories. Energising this doubly collective process is the agency of the participants. It is meaning brought about *with* others that distinguishes the entire venture; every point put forward, every question answered, every answer questioned becomes an instance of exercise of agency.

A third aspect is the potential of the processes enacted to both transform and maintain shared meaning. These processes must not be reduced to processes of talk. Rather they should be viewed in their capacity to bring to awareness what is taken for granted, to search for reasons, to generate a distance between the participant and the concept discussed, to detach issues from the

space within which the adolescents are immersed. On the other hand, these processes demand mutual understanding, crystallising constellations of shared meaning. This collective achievement appears as the flip side of transformation, as the very anchor that provides adolescents with stable meanings to make sense of what is the case, of what is right, and of what is genuine, regarding matters of sexuality. These processes however, do not guarantee any predetermined outcome, nor do they guarantee the fate of what is put under scrutiny. Rather these are open-ended processes that allow for questions but do not provide pre-determined answers. What is important here is that along these processes of collective production, subjective experiences, norms and values, and the 'facts out there', all transit back and forth between fluidity and solidity. What was a crystallised reality is made fluid, stripped from its immutable certainty and brought closer to the transformative grasp of the actors taking part, who, immersed in a collective process of creation, turn the fluid back into something solid.

# Chapter 7

## Our Sexuality II

### Intricate Affairs

This chapter provides the second of two analyses of a series of adolescent explorations of sexuality done in the project SaRA. Following the same rationale used in chapters five and six, this chapter is divided into two parts: Part I is a Methodological Note detailing the steps employed in the analysis and interpretation of the data; and Part II provides the results of the analysis. Once again, while the reader is invited to explore the generation of paths for data analysis described in the methodological note (Part I), the two parts that make this chapter can be considered and read independently.

#### I. Methodological note

The methodological steps taken in order to analyse the adolescents' explorations of sexuality were described in chapter six. The reader is invited to go to the Methodological Note in part I of chapter six for a detailed exposition of such steps. Nevertheless here, I will provide a brief summary of the stages that followed. The data collected<sup>1</sup> was arranged into sequences of i) film, ii) presentation of the film and iii) discussion of the film; this chapter deals with the second analysis of a group of 16 such sequences, those containing the *dramas* created, presented and discussed by the adolescents. All 16 sequences were transcribed and the transcripts were coded with the aid of the text interpretation software package, Atlas/Ti. The coded material was rearranged code-wise and it was read and re-read with the goal of fleshing out thematic commonalities, that is, salient patterns that appeared both thickly

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<sup>1</sup> See table 4.1 in chapter four for a summary of the data collected and its arrangement for analysis.

addressed and connected *within* each codes, and popular *across* the sequences. Two central themes emerged from the analytic reading of the codes, as follows: the family and the peers as central *networks of communication*, and the *experience of pregnancy*. While the former was dealt with in chapter six, this chapter will be dedicated to presenting the analysis relating to the theme of the experience of pregnancy, as enacted and problematised by the adolescents.

## **II. Pregnancy explored**

This part introduces the results of the second exploration of the investigations made by the adolescents of their sexuality. The text is divided into four sections. Section II.1 focuses on the aspects the adolescents located at the root of the phenomenon of pregnancy. Section II.2 analyses how the adolescents framed the relationship between pregnancy and the pregnant subject. Section II.3 looks at the practical handling of pregnancy by the adolescents. Finally, the fourth section (II.4) puts forward a conceptual integration of these explorations of pregnancy.

### **II.1 Behind pregnancy**

#### **II.1.1 The backdrop**

Luis (presenter): The video is about a family, in which the father, who is unemployed, drinks and beats the mother. The mother, tired of this situation, kicks him out of the house. She has a son and a daughter and decides to take up a job in another town, taking her son with her and leaving her daughter under the care of her sister. But her sister makes the daughter work like a servant. The daughter has a girlfriend who is into bad vices [...] vices, nightclubs and all that. She [the daughter] meets a boy; he makes her drink and gets her pregnant.



{Pausing the video to add commentary, and reflect on the story}  
(PacADrP, P2/P3)<sup>2</sup>

Luis's passage contains, possibly, all major aspects that appear behind the phenomenon of pregnancy, as depicted by the young people in the sexuality dramas. His description is centred on the family, made up of an unemployed, alcoholic, and abusive father, a mother, who bears the weight of a harsh and adverse environment, and a daughter, neglected and abused by her aunt. To break free from this chain of abuse, Luis tells us that the daughter relies on a friend, who provides access to the less wholesome aspects of the local social life. In this process, the daughter meets a young man. This man, however, relying once again on alcohol and abuse, "gets her pregnant".

According to Luis, pregnancy has a dense backdrop, to say the least. Although he presents the events in way that may imply a linear circle of male-led alcohol-induced abuse, the drama that he summarises in the passage above, as much as the other dramas and the subsequent discussions, show a richer and more complex picture. Luis's words, however, provide us with a powerful illustration of the web of everyday life events that, according to the adolescents, brew behind a phenomenon so often interpreted as a matter of female biology. Let us look at them in more detail.

Pregnancy appears addressed in the dramas and discussions as a phenomenon that takes place within the boundaries of the **community**. The

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<sup>2</sup> The index in brackets reads as follows: the first three letters (i.e. Pac) refer to the community that produced the drama (in the example, the rural village of Paccha); the fourth letter (i.e. 'A') refers to workshop in which drama was presented (in the example, the workshop held in Ayacucho -for details on the workshops please refer to chapter four, section two); the fifth and sixth letters (i.e. 'Dr') refer to the type of document (in this example, like in all the examples in this chapter, Dr refers to drama); the seventh letter (i.e. 'P') refers to the instance in the sequence of drama, presentation of the drama, and discussion of the drama, (no letter for drama, 'P' for Presentation, and 'Q' for discussion). The code after the comma (i.e. P2/P3) indicates location of the passage in the transcript, in our case the number of the pause in the presentation (i.e. the second and third pauses -for details, please refer to chapter four, section three) or the number of the question in the discussion (e.g. 'Q4' will indicate the fourth question) or finally the minute in the original film (i.e. '4' 35'').

community appears as the first key component that populates the backdrop of pregnancy. What goes on in the local village, the characteristics of the town, and the life situation of community members, all affect, and at times, determine the stories of pregnancy. Community features frame pregnancy in endless ways:

Antonio (presenter): This is the story of Pamela, an adolescent girl, who grew up with her parents and, as she was an only child, her parents gave her all the necessary love and affection. This made her become very interested in school; she excelled in it, she was the best student at her school. But, when Pamela started her third year of secondary school she was driven into new friendships. Why? Because her parents began to undergo economic problems, which made them neglect her and not take the care they used to. So Pamela, in looking for friends, found bad company, and her friends led her to the wrong path. {Pausing the video -on a 'white screen' deliberately added to the film- to comment on circumstances surrounding the main character's life} (HuaLDrP, P1)

Victor (presenter): In Ayacucho, it could be said, girls go out with bus conductors because they don't charge them for bus rides (laughs in the audience). This is the problem. Well, there are bus conductors that have good intentions, aren't there? But the majority are quite bad. This is a serious issue in our community, bus drivers and conductors that generate this: rapes. {Pausing the video to comment on the 'real life' relationship between the story and the community} (Applauses) (ArtADrP, P6)

Antonio and Victor problematise community factors which hit at the heart of pregnancy. Antonio weaves a picture of indirect community effects; according to him, parental struggle to survive economic difficulties are at the root of Pamela's pregnancy story. For Victor, on the other hand, the circumstances are far more direct and cruel. Behind the phenomenon of pregnancy, there lives a **struggling community**; and the terms of the struggle can be harsh. From the shades of the struggle, from the very bottom of the pit, Victor brings to light a connection that is a key feature in the backdrop of pregnancy, and part and parcel of the everyday life of his community.

Although struggling communities seem to directly and indirectly influence the phenomenon of pregnancy, the landscape of community effects on pregnancy, as the stories enacted in the dramas tell us, must not be reduced to economic reasons. The language of deprivation, so often brought to the fore to characterise the local reality, co-exists with other languages, with other stories. One such story, repeatedly told in the dramas, is about boys and girls leaving the community and going elsewhere; these stories are about adolescents facing new realities, incorporating new horizons, becoming different. These boys and girls, who change as they change place, generate stories of friction between contrasting worldviews. This friction attribute to and with endless maze of causes and consequences also touches the phenomenon of pregnancy. Let us follow one such story by looking at another drama from the young people of the rural Andean village of Cangallo.

Manuel (presenter): We will present a drama called 'Life is worth nothing'. It's about alcohol problems, which make the reality of Cangallo. The story is about a boy, Tulio, who is eight years old. He goes to Lima and then comes back to Cangallo; he's somehow liberated. Well, in Cangallo we're a peaceful community and he comes back liberated ... you know what I mean ... Let's see it. {Commenting on the story, before playing the video} (CanADrP, P1)

Tulio returns to Cangallo changed; he now carries with him the experience of the big city, of the capital, Lima. He goes back to his natal Cangallo for the summer break. Cangallo hasn't changed the way he has, it's still a "peaceful community". Tulio comes to personify the childhood friend and the stranger at the same time. Tulio accesses the network of peers, his old friends, and spreads havoc throughout: alcohol, drugs and a pregnant girl.

*A group of young people are in a bar, very late in the evening. There are lots of bottles on the table, and everyone is very drunk. Tulio and Nancy, who are sitting at one corner, carry on with their conversation. He talks to her.*

Tulio: Hey, how are you feeling?

Nancy: Errr, kind of dizzy. You know, we never drink beer; I mean, we don't go out much.

Tulio: Why don't we leave the bar?

Nancy: But if we go out, my parents may see me, and they'll beat me.

Tulio: So why don't we go to the park?

Nancy: The park? All right.

*The two leave the bar, leaving behind their drunken friends.*

(CanLDr, 12' 30")

Tulio is depicted as being doubly dangerous because he is a stranger in a position to transit through the local network of peers. Taking advantage of his position, he convinces Nancy to go to the park, where, apparently, she will be safe from her parents' gaze.

Patricio (presenter): That night, they got together and he abused her. And three months passed and she was pregnant. Now she's telling her friend that she's pregnant; let's see. {Pausing the video to add commentary on the story} (CanADrP, P10)

The community seems to provide the horizon of signification within which the phenomenon of pregnancy takes place. Either as a struggling community or as an innocent community, broad environmental factors are singled out and problematised by the adolescents as contributing to the roots of pregnancy. However, as illustrated in the examples above, there are other factors in the backdrop of pregnancy, two of which feature especially prominently: the family and the peers.

When it comes to making sense of **family issues**, distorted communication between parents and children seems to be paramount. This issue may take different forms. For example, according to two Luis, it is about a relationship of neglect and abuse between an aunt and the girl in her care. Following Antonio, at the root of the problems of neglect there lies a subtler component, which he identifies as a failure by the family to give attention and affection to their daughter. Antonio's argument on the issue of neglect focuses on the understanding that, according to him, is necessary between adolescents and their families; Nancy, in her quest to spend time with Tulio without her parents finding out, provides a powerful illustration of the point.

In short, the family appears as a second key component in the backdrop of pregnancy. The detailed workings of the relationship of communication (or lack of communication) between adolescents and their families was explored at length in the previous chapter; here, I limit my comments to the specific connection made by the adolescents between family and pregnancy issues.

The third key component in the backdrop of pregnancy is the **peer group**. From girlfriends who lead girls astray, to conniving and manipulative boys who, with the help of alcohol, take advantage of girls, peers were singled out as a key feature in the causes of pregnancy. The workings of communication among peers, in particular the issues of instrumental boys and the influence of advice and recommendations, have already been discussed in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, building on the findings of the previous chapter, I now turn to the issue of peers and pregnancy to try to begin to disentangle the part played by peers in this phenomenon, so intricately articulated by the adolescents in the dramas and subsequent presentations and discussions.

There is one aspect that immediately comes to the fore in the depiction of peers and pregnancy: **the sexual act**. There seems to be a moment, in depicting the backdrop of pregnancy, when adolescent split into single-gender groups. Thus segregated, an operation of allocation and duplication seems to occur: boys are anchored at the backdrop; and girls are placed not just at the backdrop of the problem (together with boys) but also within the problem itself. The dramas and discussions treated pregnancy as an issue rooted in the life of the community, influenced by the workings of the family and peers, but in the final instance, pregnancy was invariably reduced to a problem that concerned women, almost exclusively. This differentiation is a very important one. Let us look into this issue, by examining a passage extracted from a heated debate on the workings, causes and consequences of the sexual act.

Lourdes<sup>3</sup> (audience): You're saying that girls don't take precautions; and what about boys, why don't they take precautions?

Alejandra (presenter): Why? Because they often forget. As the saying goes, 'the flesh calls flesh', doesn't it?

Lurdes: You 're saying that girls receive information –and boys?

Alejandra: Boys ... some know about it, but they don't take precautions. I don't know, they forget. You just forget, because you're a boy (laughs and applause from audience).

Aldo (audience): In my opinion, boys don't worry about it; when they have sex, they just don't worry about it.

Lurdes: And why not?

Aldo (audience): Because they won't get pregnant (laughs and applause from the audience).

Omar (audience): What happens is that so many young people just take advantage of the situation, the moment of pleasure; I mean, they don't see the future, the consequences of a relationship, let's say, an unwanted relationship. What happens with boys is that that little ant climbs up to their brain and they don't know how to control themselves anymore.

(CorLDrQ, Q5/Q6)

In contrast to the community and the family, which only cause pregnancy indirectly, the issue of peers is identified as the immediate cause of pregnancy. The singling out of sex as producer of, not backdrop to, pregnancy, invests it with a special status, articulating a **fundamental relationship between sex and pregnancy**. The passage above illustrates this, depicting the sexual act between a boy and girl stripped of its social character; the humanness of the man and the woman engaged in sex gets suspended at the very point of the sexual act. Omar's metaphor of the ant taking over the brain conveys the image beautifully. The sexual act ceases to appear as an intentional social act grounded in community roots, and becomes a behaviour that corresponds exclusively to the domain of nature. There seems to be no language to disclose sex, to discuss it, let alone to achieve any type of understanding about it.

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<sup>3</sup> Lourdes was part of the SaRA team of professionals that acted as facilitators in the workshops.

The impossibility of talking about sex generates an inability to lay down any type of responsibilities surrounding it, any type of agreement or mutual understanding. The result is a perception that it is up to the woman, to whom nature has given the mission of pregnancy, to care about this one major consequence of sex. The sexual act, or rather sexual behaviour, appears as the key turning point where the backdrop ends and the issue of pregnancy begins. Up to the instance of sex, pregnancy gets treated as a social fact, characterised by complex factors, from struggling communities to neglectful families, from vice-inducing girlfriends to manipulative boys, etcetera. Pregnancy's backdrop is inherently *social*. However, when it comes to the sexual act, the social backdrop vanishes. The sexual act operates like a black box, and what happens inside the black box becomes a puzzling mystery, one with no language to disclose it, to bring it to existence. The absence of discussion makes it seem as if sex doesn't actually happen. The stories jump from social backdrop to pregnant girl – the other end of the black box.

The link between pregnancy and sex is circumscribed to the domain of nature. Its social side is trapped inside the black box of the sexual act, which makes it impossible to disclose. Deprived of a language, pregnancy, like sex, cannot be talked about, or handled socially, or prevented consensually. It is up to women to be sensible about it, as Alejandra stresses in the passage above. In short, women are singled out as the bearers of reason; men's role gets relegated, in the social world to mere inhabitants of the backdrop, and in the natural world, to basic creatures driven by uncontrollable sexual urges, with no agency at all.

Summing up, the backdrop of pregnancy is a rich and complex world, according to the stories told in the dramas by the adolescents, and above all, following the heated debates that these generated. The community sets the horizon for the phenomenon of pregnancy, exercising its influence in many ways. From the dramas and discussions, we could see how community

deprivation and struggle, and community innocence appeared as two main aspects of local life that have a bearing on pregnancy. Family and peers are the other two key inhabitants of this complex backdrop. Finally, the sexual act appears as the fundamental turning point in the analysis of the roots and causes of pregnancy. In particular, the sexual is characterised as an a-social phenomenon, connected to pregnancy in a similarly a-social fashion. In the next section (II.1.2), I will be exploring in more detail, some implications of this important characterisation of the sexual act as an a-social act. The examination of the connection between sex and pregnancy on the other hand, will occupy the subsequent two parts of the chapter (II.2 and II.3).

### II.1.2 Stories of sex

*Scene of a lively party: lots of salsa music, fun, dancing and drinking. Closeup on Mauro and Cristi, who are having a conversation.*

Mauro: Will you come with me to get some tapes?

Cristi: Sure, let's go.

*Mauro and Cristi leave. Holding hands, they walk along a dark road towards Mauro's house. Mauro and Cristi arrive to Mauro's; the camera is placed inside the house, 'waiting' for them to enter the room.*

Mauro: Come on in.

*The two get into the house and, as Cristi waits sitting in an armchair, Mauro looks for the tapes.*

Mauro: Fuck! The tapes aren't here; I'll go and check in the bedroom, ok?

*Mauro leaves the room and Cristi follows behind him. Once in the room, Mauro carries on searching, while Cristi looks around. Mauro gets close to Cristi and hugs her from behind. He starts to kiss her neck, and switches the lights out. Kissing, they go to the bed. The only light available is a tiny bedside table lamp. Mauro and Cristi carry on kissing passionately.*

Cristi: Switch off the light please.

*Mauro switches off the light.*

(ElCADr, 24'27")

A sex scene, one among the many enacted by the adolescents in the dramas, an obligatory stop along the stories of pregnancy. The care and detail that sex images convey reveal a great deal about the centrality of the sexual act in the



adolescents' accounts. The analytic focus here, however, will be on the ways in which this instance of sex, this artfully portrayed private event, reaches and unfolds within the network of peers.

In this drama, Cristi and Mauro each put the episode in circulation, by talking to their respective friends. Not surprisingly, the event gives rise to a wealth of lively stories, but it would be erroneous to understand these as just 'subjective experiences' of an 'objective fact'. Rather, the stories that Mauro and Cristi tell their peers, together with their friends' reactions, and their own counter-reactions, provide us with an account of the ways participants in conversation feel about sex (particularly Mauro and Cristi), and, simultaneously constitute testimonies of what happened one night after a party, and of a collective performance of what is perceived as right and wrong in adolescent sex. Let us now look at two such stories. First, we will attempt to analyse the conversation Cristi had with her friend Lucina, to whom she first confides her encounter with Mauro. Subsequently, we will analyse Mauro's conversation with his friend about what happened after the party.

#### *The girls' version*

*Sitting in the living room at Lucina's house, Cristi and Lucina are having a conversation.*

Cristi visibly upset and worried: I want to tell you about my problem.

Lucina: What problem?

Cristi: Something very bad has happened to me and I don't have anyone to talk to ... you're the person I thought of.

Lucina: Tell me.

Cristi: Remember the party? Remember that my boyfriend Mauro asked me to go with him to get some tapes? Well, he grabbed me, and started to say things to me ... he lowered my blouse and all that ... you can imagine ...

Lucina: What?

Cristi: We did it. Everything. It was lovely!

Lucina: You did it?!?

Cristi: Yes, I did it. But Mauro told me 'Let's do it, don't you trust me?' and I told him 'I trust you, I'm your girlfriend' and I gave in to him, but it was something very nice.

Lucina: What?!

Cristi: I did it.

(ElCADr, 9')

The tenor of the conversation implies that this revelation is an important issue both for Cristi and for Lucina. Let us look at the dialogue in more detail. Cristi initiates the conversation (she has gone to Lucina's for the talk). She's anxious and nervous and has a desperate need to talk to someone, and her initial attempt at conveying to Lucina what happened to her at the party gives testimony of her anxiety: "I want to tell you about my problem... Something very bad has happened to me".

Although there appear to be no words to disclose what has happened to Cristi, she has already characterised it as "bad" and as "a problem". This bad problem distresses her and telling it to her friend appears as a source of initial relief. Lucina expresses concern and invites her to continue, but before the problem is revealed, Cristi sets the stage. By singling Lucina out as the "person I [Cristi's] thought of" to share the problem, Cristi reveals the thought process that yielded Lucina as the appropriate confidant, thereby making explicit her regard and consideration for her friend. Cristi has opened up a belief in Lucina, which carries a heavy signification of self-disclosure. This disclosure attracts Lucina like a magnet: she is the privileged person to share Cristi's problem. This privileged position makes Lucina a social necessity, and her commitment to listen becomes a paramount social imperative, which Lucina is fully aware of.

Once the 'conversational stage' has been set, Cristi begins relating her version of events. Although she counts on her friend's commitment to listen, the emotional effort that the story demands, combined with the scarcity of words available to bring it into language, delay the spelling out of the crucial fact. Cristi's best shot is to skirt the issue and appeal to her friend's imagination: "... and all that ...you can imagine". However, the request to commit the

imagination is not effective; Lucina asks for more 'story', for more facts. At this point the conversation takes a fundamental turn.

Cristi finally spells out the fact: "we did it"; but immediately after she makes *herself* clear about the fact: "it was lovely". The fact and the personal evaluation of the fact are almost inseparable, but, paradoxically, they seem to have and not to have Cristi at the centre. Let us look at this in more detail. Cristi's original bad problem has begun to transform into a lovely thing; her feelings of distress have mutated, as the conversation progressed, into something rather pleasurable –indeed, she has enjoyed sex with Mauro. However, this lovely sex that gave her pleasure was initiated by Mauro, not by her. Cristi's role as the doer of sex is controversial: she did it but she did not intend to do it. When did she start doing it? When did she stop not intending to do it and begin intending to do it? It seems difficult to disentangle. Cristi was in it as a beneficiary of pleasure but she wasn't there as a doer of sex. Cristi solves this puzzle by arguing that she gave in to it, although at no point does she hesitate about the pleasure she experienced. So, why was Cristi ready to give into sex with Mauro? Because she "trusted" him, she was his "girlfriend". These issues provide Cristi with a legitimate reason to integrate the fact of sex with the pleasure of sex.

Cristi's story articulates the complexity of the private feeling, the social norm and the cultural fact in a very colourful and convincing way. And Lucina's initial perplexity and request for verification is equally telling: she understood what was going on but she had to be clear about Cristi's awareness of her protagonism. By now, Cristi is relaxed and confident; she has spelt out her argument clearly and made her point, so she does not hesitate in saying "I did it".

*The boys' version*

*Two boys –Mauro and Penaco- are sitting relaxed on some steps in the main square having a conversation; it is daytime.*

Mauro: Listen to this mate, last night I got into Cristi's pants.

Penaco: No?!

Mauro: What a shag! It was great!

Penaco: Fuck man, you're so lucky!

Mauro: Shit, you should have pulled someone too so we could have both done it, man!

Penaco: None of them was coming my way man!

Mauro: Look, the thing is to make it happen man. I just did it all like we planned.

Penaco: Ahh ... the plan.

Mauro: Fuck man, you know, it was so good man. I'm never gonna forget that man!

Penaco: Man, she must have fucked you so good!?!

Mauro: She was bursting for it!

(ElCADr, 13'43'')

Outside, in the main square, two boys hold a conversation. We do not know how, why or when they got together: Did they bump into each other? Did Mauro 'summon' Penaco? Was it the other way round? Have they been there for long? Although all these questions may remain unanswered, the atmosphere of relaxation that surrounds Mauro and Penaco indicates that talks in the square are a common feature for these boys. The square acts as a regular stage for likewise regular gatherings rather than as an atypical venue for an ad hoc information summit. The square, the getting together and the dialogue unfold in an ordinary fashion; venue and event appear bundled up in a way that conveys a familiarity that reaches the participants, as much as the interaction.

Framed within this quasi-natural environment, the conversation begins with Mauro getting straight to the point. He states the facts in a very clear fashion: he locates the event temporally, situates himself in the action, spells out the action accomplished, and discloses the other person in the story. Mauro's line is compact and focused; the full story seems to have been spelt out in just a handful of words. His story, however, is not just a factual description of what

he has done the previous night. Weaved into the facts, there is a depiction of Mauro as clearly positioned in the role of protagonist. From behind the facts, moreover, it becomes clear that Mauro is not only pleased with the events of the previous night, he is also exceedingly pleased with *himself* –he is bursting with pride. But let us turn our attention to Penaco first.

Penaco's first reaction to the news is one of cautious acknowledgement. Although he looks aware of the importance of the events and does not seem to doubt or challenge the truthfulness of Mauro's account, Penaco demands more information and invites him to carry on with the story. The invitation, which leads to Mauro's expressive outburst of satisfaction, seems to act as a prudent endorsement of Mauro's implicit request to take the centre stage and relate his prowess. Penaco gives the green light to Mauro, but it appears to be a pale green one: reassuring but also inquisitive. The vulnerability of Penaco's endorsement soon verifies, once Mauro's voices his feelings regarding the sex had.

Penaco seems to experience an overdose of Mauro's story and tries to tone down Mauro's raging protagonism by bringing the luck factor into the conversation: "Fuck man, you're so lucky!" This qualifier operates at several levels: it stresses that fortune was on Mauro's side; and it hints at Penaco's discomfort, probably due to feeling overshadowed by such a story of prowess. Indeed, Penaco seems to find little room to express discomfort in a direct way; by appealing to luck he tries to erode part of Mauro's protagonism, thereby saving part of his own dignity –at least partially and in a roundabout manner. Finally, Penaco's 'reactive' response conveys a sense of normative reproach towards Mauro's apparent excess of protagonism; from Penaco's position, Mauro's account of his own sexual prowess sounds too self-centred, and this does not appear to be right.

The various layers of meaning built into Penaco's claim "Fuck man, you're so lucky!" do not go unnoticed by Mauro, who promptly embarks on a concerted effort to reject Penaco's attempt to undermine his achievement. Mauro's reply also operates at various levels, the most salient of which is the thematisation of Penaco's *normative* challenge to Mauro's excess of protagonism. Mauro's strategy consists of issuing a 'counter' admonishment castigating Penaco: rather than an excess of protagonism on Mauro's side, what Penaco should be looking at is his own deficit of pro-activity. This lack appears, according to Mauro, as something almost unacceptable: boys ought to seize the opportunity; Mauro has done it while Penaco has let the chance go, and this does not seem right. Built into the reproach, there is also a factual description of the 'landscape' of the party. Mauro's recollection is that there were plenty of opportunities to be taken advantage of; it was not a matter of luck but of something else. Once Mauro has addressed Penaco's normative challenge with a counter admonishment, he seems to become aware of the scale of the punishment inflicted and opts to narrow down its effect. In a skilful way, Mauro diverts the normative load of his reprimand; he appeals to a hypothetical level, in which the two of them become protagonists together: had Penaco pulled too, they would have shared the experience.

Penaco seems to accept Mauro's conciliatory offer and carries on with the conversation, putting forward issues beyond his control as the reason for his failure to "pull" in the party. According to him, no girls picked him up. Penaco's utterance confirms Mauro's thesis of a lack of proactiveness on his side. On the other hand, the same claim draws Mauro into Penaco's argument of there being a luck factor plying to Mauro's advantage. At this point Mauro decides to clear any doubts regarding the dynamics behind the facts of the event and provides an explanation of the tactics underpinning his success with Cristi. First, Mauro points to a crucial issue overlooked by Penaco: to have a tactical approach to pulling (rather than waiting to be pulled). Second, Mauro reminds Penaco of his plan to pick Cristi up, and although the plan is

not revealed, we can gauge from Penaco's reaction that the matter had been addressed in the past. By now the terms of the interaction become clearer: Mauro has a successful sex story to tell, and thus deserves complete centre stage to relate the story, with all the honours and reverence due for the accomplishment. Thus, Penaco has no choice but to give into the overwhelming evidence and takes a side position, allowing Mauro to claim his prize. Mauro carries on with more detail of the pleasure experienced in his sex with Cristi while Penaco listens to what he has to say, duly cheering to encourage more and more from Mauro.

*Have sex, talk sex*

Mauro and Cristi left during the party and went to Mauro's home where they had sex. This is the short version of the events. However, the examination of the two stories put in circulation afterwards tells us more about the two very different, and at the same time very similar, locations of the sexual act in boys' and girls' conversations. While Penaco and Mauro seem to be permanently wrestling for the centre stage in the conversation, each aiming to deliver a story of instrumentally crafted success, Cristi and Lucina weave a very complex rationalisation: allowing for space to disclose sex while being able to account for their actions. While Mauro's story is challenged in its tones of excessive prowess and disproportionate dispensation of self-praise, Cristi's is confronted with the dilemma of coherently articulating having sex into a story told in words –a problem that does not arise for Mauro, since his story points elsewhere, towards personal achievement.

While the two stories reflect the characteristics of the networks they circulate within (as analysed in the previous chapter), they share a fundamental commonality: they both stand in a relationship of profound discontinuity to the 'event' of sex. The event of sex, the sexual act, seems to have occurred outside language, or better said, outside conversation. Talk only emerged later on, in the stories so colourfully put in circulation by Mauro and Cristi.

The absence of talk at the time of the event of sex deprived it from the words that would have added form and substance, that would have bound and bonded further the two sexual partners. But language only appears in the stories told later on by Mauro and Cristi. There is a conversational gap between the event and the stories, one that is explained by the very lack of talk at the time of the event, as if there had been no story of sex emerging at the time of sex: a fundamental break between fact and conversation. Let us now move on and explore what happens when it is not sex but pregnancy that faces the gap between fact and conversation.

## **II.2 Becoming a pregnant subject**

Within a context of harshness, via the sexual act, the adolescents get pregnant. In the dramas and the discussions that these prompted, sex shows a paradoxical quality of being a social act with no language. As a language-less act, sex ceases to be a social action and becomes a behaviour, a black box instance in the life journey of these adolescents that the social world fails to reach. There is no more responsibility, no more talking, no more agreement, no more understanding. At the exit end of the black box, however, there is a return to the social, a return to a language-ordered reality, to a linguistically disclosed world.

It may be that by going through the black box of sex, the natural appearance of sex causes the perception of pregnancy as an exclusively nature fact. In this context, pregnancy as a phenomenon seems to occur to women *first* qua animals, and only later, if ever, qua human, social beings conscious of themselves and others. In the paragraphs that follow I will explore *the ways in which the adolescents enacted and problematised their attempts to locate and embed pregnancy into the social world of everyday life.*



Anita (presenter): In a moment we'll present a drama called 'Sex in adolescents'. We chose this name because we think that adolescents have sex at an early age. Some do it out of curiosity, others to know how it feels, and so on. That 's why we've chosen the name. We've made this video to show that, because of having sex at an early age, some adolescents catch diseases or others become infertile, due to having to abort when they get pregnant. I'll play the video. {Commenting on the story about to be played to the audience} (ElCADrP, P1)

Here Anita attempts to bridge the gap between sex and its consequences. The link proves difficult to make. Anita hesitates between explaining the problem in terms of age-appropriateness, and addressing it as an imbalance between the boiling desire to experience sex, and the array of risks associated with the practice of sex. The hesitation leaves Anita somewhat confused. She is neither bold enough in her elaboration of the age argument (age is portrayed as a relevant but not exclusive factor); nor is she fully convincing in drawing a link between the pursuit of sensual experience, and the potential of risk. Nevertheless, irrespective of Anita's hesitation, the terms of the equation seem to be clear: there are adolescents, there is sex and there are associated risks. Making sense of the workings of the equation, piecing its terms together, proves to be a bit more complicated. Let us now look into some of the attempts made by the adolescents to articulate this complicated dilemma, concentrating our attention on the very one risk that captivated much of the adolescents' time and effort: pregnancy.

#### *Becoming pregnant to your girl friends*

*Synthia arrives to Diana's home very distressed. She knocks at the door –a big light blue metal fence.*

Synthia: Addressing Diana as she opens the door, Hi Diana.

Diana: Hi Synthia, how are you?

Synthia in desperation: Diana ...

Diana : What's wrong?

Synthia: I have a problem.

Diana: What problem?

Synthia: I haven't been ill<sup>4</sup> for months. *Synthia cries.* I just don't know what to do... Diana, I need your help ... *Synthia is very upset and distressed.* Diana, Please help me, say something!!

Diana: What do you want me to do? I told you to take precautions! Please don't come to me with this problem now!!

Synthia: Diana please!

Diana: You got yourself in trouble. Now, you sort it out. Don't come to me.

Synthia: Diana you know how much I've suffered, please you've got to help me.

*Diana and Synthia speak at the same time.*

Diana: Why in earth didn't you take care?!?

Synthia: Diana please you've got to help me, you're the only person I have.

*Silence.*

Diana: Please go away, I don't want to see you. Just go. *She closes the door.*

(ArtADr, 12'18'')

According to this passage, the social horizon of sex-that-results-in-pregnancy is desolating. There seems to be no place for pregnancy to enter the social world. Synthia is pregnant. Is she so socially? Synthia, the female, is pregnant but Synthia the adolescent living in the community and sharing her life with friends, seems to find no space to become pregnant before an other. Although Diana and Synthia are good friends, Diana is not able to identify any conceivable space to locate her friend's pregnant state; instead, she issues a series of recriminations and then turns her back to the problem and to Synthia. Let us look at another passage.

*In the street; Mily and Wendy are having a conversation.*

Mily: What's wrong? Please talk, I'm your friend, what's going on?

Wendy: Please, I want you to promise me that you won't tell anyone.

Mily: Alright, but you're scaring me. What's up? Please tell me.

Wendy: Errr ... remember the day Damián and I went to that party? The day my sister and I sneaked out of the house to go to the party?

Mily: Yeah, yeah, I remember.

Wendy: Well on that day ... errr... I got pregnant.

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<sup>4</sup> To "be ill" is a colloquial way of saying to "have a period".

Mily: What?!?! It's impossible!!! What have you done?!?! You're a fool!!!

Wendy: But please, please don't tell anyone, I beg you.  
(LaVLDr, 21'25'')

Another example of the beginning of the ordeal to bring pregnancy into language; an illustration of the endeavour faced by Wendy to become pregnant before her girlfriends. Let us concentrate on the progression of recriminations that Mily delivers at the moment her friend tells her that she is pregnant. First, there is "what", a rhetorical request for confirmation of the utterance that Wendy has so clearly spelt out. It is not the case that Wendy's line was difficult to understand or that Mily did not hear what her friend said. Rather, Mily has to arrange into her own sense making the fact that Wendy has stated. Pregnancy has made its first social appearance and things are beginning to look complicated. Mily's reaction to Wendy's first attempt to embed pregnancy in a social frame takes place in an entirely un-chartered territory; "what" seems the most suitable word to start giving a language to pregnancy.

Second, Mily spells out another rhetorical denial –"It's impossible". This is a powerful denial, but its power does not reside within the denial itself. Mily is clearly not refuting Wendy's statement; she believes that her friend truly is pregnant. However, this quasi-denial is significant as it links and supports the preceding "what", with the reaction that follows: "What have you done?" Mily's denial acts as a bridge between a speaker's expression, and the first fully interactional utterance; it connects pregnancy, for the first time, to a fully-fledged conversation.

Third, by the time Mily utters her "What have you done?" she is entirely addressing the hearer. Further, Wendy is addressed in her double role of partner in interaction and character of the story, as the 'doer' of pregnancy. It is clear that Mily knows *what* her friend has done; she does not need any

factual clarification. The 'what', rather, is intended to address the normative element of Wendy's actions. Mily's reprimand seems to imply that Wendy has done something quite indefensible; this paves the way for the final admonishment: "You're a fool!!!" The 'victim' gets patently blamed by her good friend. For Wendy, becoming pregnant is proving to be an unpleasant experience, to say the least. The only strategy she may well carry out for the moment is to 'buy some time' and keep the matter underground.

Synthia's and Wendy's cases, as portrayed in the conversations above, depict the landscape of pregnancy in its movement from a fact of nature to a social fact. Talking to girlfriends, we learn from the dramas, appears as the first attempt by pregnant girls to embed their new 'condition' within a social reality. Nevertheless, finding a language for pregnancy proves near impossible. Embedding pregnancy in conversation, *becoming* pregnant, means far more than informing an audience about a fact of female biology. It necessitates a framework that enables the pregnant subject as much as the partners in conversation to articulate the phenomenon in dialogue; a framework that allows pregnancy to enjoy legitimate social currency; a framework that makes mutual understanding possible. The exchanges between Wendy and Mily and Cynthia and Diana robustly illustrate the arid landscape that pregnancy encounters on its way from biology to sociality.

*Becoming pregnant to the "father of the child"*

In the dramas and discussions, the issue of pregnant girls addressing the pregnancy with the respective boy brought up two important issues. First, it illustrated the virtual impossibility for boys to find a social space to perceive themselves as responsible for a pregnancy. This was powerfully portrayed and numerous issues contributing to the absence of this space were articulated.

*Daytime, in the park; Alejandra approaches Santiago and 'summons' him anxiously for a talk.*

Alejandra: Something very serious has happened.

Santiago: What?

Alejandra: I'm pregnant.

Santiago: What?!?! Pregnant?!?!

Alejandra: Yes.

*Silence.*

Santiago: And what do you want me to do?

Alejandra: What do you mean?! You promised that if I got pregnant ...

Santiago: What?! And you believed that?

Alejandra: But ...

Santiago: Oh what a fool you are! I thought you were smarter than that...

Alejandra *punching Santiago in his chest*: You're a pig, a bastard!!! Sofia was right.

Santiago: You should have listened to your friend and none of this would have happened.

*Long pause.*

Alejandra: And you're going to leave my just like that?!

Santiago *raising his hands as if to deny any involvement*: Well, tomorrow I'm off, back in Lima. My family and my girlfriend are waiting for me there. I'm off. Bye.

*Santiago walks away.*

Alejandra: Santiago. Santiago!!

Santiago: Bye, I'm off.

*Santiago walks away, towards his friends.*

(ElCLDr, 8'30")

Santiago's actions are callous, instrumental and conniving –a classic portrayal of boys– and in this case the context is seen to play to his advantage. Santiago is in a position to disengage from the event precisely because he was never engaged in it. Alejandra faces a losing battle: making accountable someone with whom she has not shared a social event but only sexual behaviour. Nevertheless, this is just one of the ways in which boys' reactions were portrayed; but even in the occasions that they appeared as sympathetic, coming to terms with the situation was still a thorny matter.

*Atilio gets on a bus. He puts his luggage away and sits down looking very worried. Sergio, Atilio's friend, gets on the bus too.*

Sergio: Hi Atilio, what's up? Are you leaving?

Atilio: Yes, I'm leaving, I'm going to Lima; my parents are sending me over to an *internado*<sup>5</sup> school.

Sergio: And your problem with her?

Atilio: Nooo, I'm being sent to the *internado* by force. Please tell her that I'm going there against my will, they're sending me there.

Sergio: She's gonna feel real bad...

Atilio: I know. But tell her that on Saturday I'll ring her. Please tell her to be at the public phone office by seven.

Sergio: Ok.

Atilio: Please tell her.

Sergio *shaking hands with him*: I'm sorry; I didn't know you were leaving, otherwise I'd have been here earlier.

Atilio: No problem.

Sergio: Well, It's running late ...

Atilio: Bye.

Sergio: Bye and good luck. *Close up on Atilio's face.*

(CorLDr, 11' 02")

In this case, Atilio is being sent away by his parents for getting a girl pregnant. In contrast to Santiago, Atilio feels empathy and care for the pregnant girl. He seems ready to become a part in this story of pregnancy, but his readiness collapses before the will of his family, who conceive of no social space for the pregnancy. In this example, pregnancy moves powerfully underground, below the social gaze; and despite Atilio's resistance, we gain a flavour of the insurmountable task he faces in becoming, socially, the father of a child.

*Becoming pregnant to the family.*

Socialising pregnancy appears to be a colossal challenge. Let us now move on and examine the ways in which the adolescents treated the issue of becoming pregnant before their families.

*Esther Milagros is very anxiously pacing up and down in the living room at home. Her mother, Luisa, is sitting in a sofa reading.*

Luisa: Is there anything wrong?

Esther Milagros: No, I'm ok mum.

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<sup>5</sup> An "internado" school is an institution, usually run by the Church, where children are given schooling and boarding. Internado schools differ from British boarding schools in that they are not accessible only to the wealthy.

Luisa *standing up and going towards Esther Milagros*: But you look strange, what's up?

Esther Milagros: Oh, nothing mum, nothing.

Luisa: Come on, sit down here with me. *The two go and sit in the sofa.* Tell me what's wrong, you look really strange.

*Esther Milagros, covers her face in desperation*: Mother, I don't know how to tell it to you ...

Luisa: Tell me what?

Esther Milagros: Mum, I'm pregnant.

Luisa: What?!?

Esther Milagros: I'm pregnant, mum.

Luisa: You're pregnant?! Esther!

Esther Milagros: Mum, forgive please! Forgive me!

Luisa: And when you're father finds out! What is he going to do?! Jesus Christ! What have you done?! *As they speak Carlos –the father– arrives, he walks into the room.*

Carlos: What's going on? Why are you crying? Has someone died? What's going on? Why are you crying?

Luisa: Carlos, I don't how you're going to take it but ... you're daughter is pregnant. *As Luisa speaks, Esther Milagros stands up and walks away from her mother and father.*

Carlos: What? You, pregnant!? *He walks towards his daughter and slaps her violently in the face.*

Luisa *protecting Esther Milagros*: Stop it!

Carlos: And who's the father?

Luisa: Oh please, leave her alone; don't ask this type of questions!

Esther Milagros: Please forgive me, the two of you. *Crying she seeks protection in her mother's arms.*

Carlos *visibly angry addresses his wife* Luisa: I want to talk to you.

Luisa *addressing Esther Milagros*: I'll be back soon, I'm going have a word with your father.

(CorLDr, 8'50")

Almost paraphrasing Wendy and Mily, Esther Milagros and her mother Luisa, enact a conversation mined with outrage and blame towards the victim. The argument receives further confirmation from Esther Milagros' plea for forgiveness. For the mother, the challenge of socialising her daughter's pregnancy appears immense. She has heard the facts (and the apologies); now her main concern appears to be sharing the story with her husband, for whom the burden of socialising a pregnancy proves to be no easier. The father is far from ready to take it on board; his first reactions are

astonishment and physical violence, showing little regard for his daughter. Esther Milagros' attempt to become pregnant with her family, to give pregnancy a social space within her family circle seems to have suffered a heavy setback. Let us now explore a case where a boy tries to tell his father a story of pregnancy.

*Damián arrives home to talk to his father Manolo. His girlfriend Wendy is pregnant and Damián has decided to 'test' his father's reaction by telling him that a friend of his has got his girlfriend pregnant.*

Damián: Dad, can I have a word with you?

Manolo: Yes, but please do it quickly, I'm very busy now.

Damián: It's about ... it's about a friend of mine. You know, he has a girlfriend and ... his girlfriend is pregnant.

Manolo: Damián please be clear. Is it your problem or your friend's problem?

Damián: Dad! It's a friend's problem. I just wanted to ask you for advice so that I can pass it on to him.

Manolo: Oh dear! In my times such things didn't happen. Youngsters had respect then, and we were fearful of such things happening. If I were the father of that boy, I'd kick him out of the house and get him to solve his mess by himself.

Damián: You'd kick him out?

Manolo: Yes I would. Because we bring up children with the aim of seeing them achieve more than what we have done.

Damián: But dad, my friend has this problem but he wants to carry on studying.

Manolo: Well, he'll have to face the situation. He got himself in a mess and now he's got to get himself out of it. Is that all you wanted to ask me?

*Silence.*

*(LaVLDr, 26')*

The portrayal of the father's reaction is ruthless. In this story there seems to be no room for the family to conceive of a son being involved in a pregnancy. Damián's narrative strategy supports this; he attempts to deal with the issue in the realm of the 'unreal' (not your son), which appears as the only space available to discuss the situation. Nevertheless, the father lays down a rigid normative framework for the conversation, allowing no room for argumentative manoeuvring. He then limits further to this already constrictive interactional space, by decrying the purity and responsibility of



men in bygone days. And to finish things off, he delivers a rotund threat. This multiple operation pushes Damián further away from any type of discussion. He cannot dispute factually nor can he argue normatively. Damián finds no space for his concern to be articulated and drops his attempt to socialise pregnancy before his family. Damián, like Esther Milagros, runs against an overwhelming obstacle: a closed off family. However, it becomes apparent that the young people do not attribute this closure to their parents exclusively. They see a broader forum that contributes to the impossibility of socialising pregnancy: the community itself.

*Becoming pregnant to the community*

Omar (audience): I believe that people must not be so negligent, I mean four months of pregnancy is too long a period to decide to have an abortion. Rather, if a woman is caught in something like this, I'd suggest that she keep the baby and that she face whatever may come. {Participating in a question on the issue of abortion} (HuaLDrQ, Q2)

In this passage, Omar voices his views on abortion and pregnancy. The drama that prompted this discussion told a story of a girl who, having got pregnant, decides to have an abortion, which ends up in complications that led to her death. So, the terms of the debate on abortion were greatly influenced by the gravity inherent in the decision to abort. Whether to terminate a pregnancy or not was closely related to the decision to face death or not. The dilemma for a pregnant subject becomes a very serious one: abortion is a brush with death. Omar is keen to discourage this route. Interestingly, on the other hand, having turned his back to abortion, Omar's reflection illustrates the social abyss at the edge of pregnancy: 'face it, come what may'. A pregnant woman at the crossroads will have death on one side, and an uncertain horizon of social misery on the other side. Let us look a bit more into this abyss.

Silvia (presenter): We based our story on something that happens in Coracora. There's an all-girls school and if a girl gets pregnant she gets expelled. They are not allowed to carry on. There's an 'Order Committee' that is in charge of excluding

pregnant girls. So they have to leave the school, go to other schools and sometimes to other villages. Even more, in the majority of the cases, the fathers of these babies don't want to face their responsibilities. Or rather, the parents of these boys send them to other villages too. They'd say: 'you can't bear this responsibility my son, otherwise people will talk'. Coracora's parents are worried of being shamed by the community; they want their sons to be an example. {Addressing a question on gender differences with respect to sex} (CorLDrQ, Q6)

Silvia tells her peers a powerful story about "shame" circulating in the community. The community's norms do not allow for pregnancy to become a legitimate social phenomenon among the adolescents. Silvia lays the normative infrastructure bare. She singles out the school's 'Order Committee' as an institutionalised mechanism of exclusion and constriction, a formal instance of de-legitimisation. Further, Silvia extends the horizon of the issue to include the pregnant girl, the boy, their families and all families. The local currency, according to Silvia, is the practice of exile or the negation of social life altogether. Silvia's attack on the community's handling of pregnancy was picked up by others, in a heated debate on the issue. Let us look at Jerry's argument following Silvia's point.

Jerry (audience): I think that our colleague is describing the situation of girls who fall pregnant. For example, when a girl falls pregnant her friends would say: 'Don't hang out with her, she's got *the problem*'. We have the same school issue. If a girl gets pregnant then she's excluded. She's not a good deal for the school anymore. I think that this is wrong; instead of excluding her, they should be trying to help. {Addressing a question on gender differences with respect to sex} (CorLDrQ, Q6)

Jerry's comments hit the nail on the head. First she tries a different verb to express the social location of the pregnant subject: you "fall" pregnant, you come down with pregnancy. The pregnant subject, Jerry tells us, is confined to the fringes of the fringes: deprived from education and invested with the horror of inconvenience. Her cry for help seems to condense the problem in just one exhortation.

The community not only belongs to the backdrop of pregnancy but, probably more importantly, deprives pregnancy of a legitimate social space. The hurdles in the way of becoming a pregnant subject appear immense. As this excursion into the enactment and problematisation of becoming pregnant has shown, attempts to embed pregnancy within a language that allows its disclosure yields a bleak and tortuous picture. It seems to be near impossible to become a pregnant subject. However, alongside this impossibility, pregnancy unfolds as a fact of nature, as a period that if carried all the way through, will last around nine months. Pregnancy appears trapped between nature and society. As we have seen, the correspondence between the biological and social sides of pregnancy are, as the dramas and discussions enacted by the adolescents have shown us, a very thorny matter. In particular, there seems to be a mountain to climb for adolescent girls willing to access a social space in which they can relate to others in their condition of pregnant beings. Nevertheless, their lives continue as pregnant beings despite the little recognition there is for them in the community. Being pregnant in a community that allow almost no space for being so, generates another set of demands, and problems to solve. This intricate state of affairs was colourfully enacted and vividly debated by the adolescents. In the following section we will examine precisely this.

### **II.3 Being a pregnant subject**

The intersection of pregnancy as a fact of nature, and pregnancy as a social fact has proved a difficult juncture. As we have seen, becoming pregnant before significant others appears to be an operation that is bound to run against an endless battery of obstacles. From the adolescents' dramas and problematisations, we have witnessed how the pregnant subject gets located and relocated time and again by positioning forces sprouting from countless sources and directions. However, within this horizon, the pregnant subject, as

much as the other players, has the competence to take part in the struggle and exercise her agency. Moreover, the pregnant subject, who has experienced the difficulties of becoming pregnant, also faces the problem of being pregnant, of handling pregnancy. What to do about it? This apparently simple question has no straightforward answers, and it roused abundant imagination and adrenalin in the adolescents as they attempted to provide a collective solution to it. Let us look at what happened.

### II.3.1 Situating pregnancy

*Outside in a park a group of girls is having a chat; they are conversing about becoming pregnant and what to do about it.*

Jiuliana: How horrible! Having a baby ...

Angela: Hey, don't be so mean! Babies have the right to be born too!

Castaña: I think that Angela's right. Babies have a right to life, they are not guilty of others' faults.

Jiuliana: Please! I just think differently ...

Acelga: Of course, haven't you realised this?

Durazna: So, why didn't your parents, or rather why didn't your mum abort you off?

Jiuliana: You just don't understand me. A baby would suffer a lot with someone that's not ready to bring it up.

Group: Yes, that's the case.

Acelga: We're still too young, don't you understand?

Duranza: You can rely on someone, who can help to bring it up, can't you?

Acelga: Oh, please!

(LaVLDr, 24'15")

The adolescent girls discuss the horizon of possibilities faced by a pregnant girl. According to the opinions voiced in the passage, there seems to be two sides to the argument of pregnancy. On the one hand, there are Angela, Castaña and Durazna who raise a moral argument against the prospect of termination of the pregnancy. On the hand, Jiuliana and Acelga point towards the difficulties with adolescent motherhood. An interesting side of this discussion about pregnancy is that the issue here is treated hypothetically,

since none of them is pregnant. The debate proves revealing. Once the phenomenon of pregnancy ceases to be tormented by the pressure of giving it a legitimate space to disclose it in dialogue, the social horizon within which the conversation unfolds seems to expand to new dimensions. None of these girls talk about pregnancy in the attitude of someone faced with a problem to solve. Rather, they argue for the sake of arguing, voicing their opinions from the perspective of the observer and not of the actor of pregnancy. In short, none of them is under any pressure to find a legitimate space to be pregnant in the eyes of others. Free from this kind of pressure, the focus moves elsewhere. But, let us now move on and look into the ways in which the handling of pregnancy was enacted in the real world of the dramas.

From the threads of the debate in the passage above, pregnancy appears located within a variety of possible scenarios for the pregnant girl and the baby. Three key components appear to decisively influence the decision-making horizon of the girls: the damaging aspects of early motherhood (and fatherhood), the moral burden of abortion, and the social legitimacy and support of adolescent pregnancy. Making sense of these three pieces, ordering them in a non-conflicting way appears a huge challenge. A first scenario focuses on the life project of the adolescents assessing motherhood and fatherhood against the possibility of terminating pregnancy altogether.

*In a bench at the park, Pamela and her boyfriend Pepe are having a conversation.*

Pamela: [...] I'll have an abortion.

Pepe: Are you crazy? How could you do that? I can assume my responsibility as the father!

Pamela: Forget it. I don't want to have the baby.

Pepe: But Pamela, how could you do that? You're playing with someone else's life!

Pamela: Don't even try it! Forget it! I don't want to have this baby! Bye.

*Pamela walks away. Pepe sits down; he's desperate.*

*(HuaLDr, 16'18")*

*At Cristi's; a conversation is taking place.*

Mauro: ... Well ... all right ... *addressing Cristi* I've brought you the money, so you can do it now.

Cristi *half stating, half asking*: so ... I guess I'll do it.

Lucina: Hey, are you sure of what you're about to do?

Mauro: But, what are we going to do? The two of us with a baby!

Lucina: You should have thought these things out before doing it!

Mauro: Fuck, everything happened too quickly; we didn't even have time to think!

Cristi: Well, it is the only thing we can do.  
(ElCADr, 15'40")

At first sight, it would appear that there is legitimate scope for the adolescents to place their own interests first and terminate a pregnancy. Either with or without the partner's consent, termination seems to appear as a clear alternative. However, the situation is not as simple as it may look. Behind the decision to terminate the pregnancy there seems to be an impossibility to anchor the pregnancy (and the motherhood) in the social network of the community, in particular the family.

Anaclea (audience): But why didn't she keep the baby? Knowing that her husband ... her boyfriend ... wanted to keep it, why did she abort?

Patricia (presenter): Because she [Pamela] felt she was young and ... I mean, she had her life ahead, didn't she? She just wanted to live. [...] Now, if this is right? Well, I don't think so. But it might have been a different story had she been able to tell her parents. Probably, she'd have kept the baby.

Anaclea (audience): Would you face such a situation?

Patricia (presenter): Yes, I would. I don't think I'd have an abortion. (HuaLDrQ, Q1/Q2)

According to Patricia's account, two aspects appear paramount. First, support and understanding from the family; and second, the wrongness of the act of terminating a pregnancy. Carrying on with a pregnancy seems to be related to the social support in place in the community. However, the prospect of facing pregnancy without family support complicates the argument further, creating a considerable dilemma: no legitimacy for the pregnancy and no legitimacy for the termination. Although Pamela decided to terminate the pregnancy, the

decision proved difficult. The situation would have been very different had she had social support and solidarity.

*At home, Alejandra and her friend Carmen are talking to Alejandra's parents.*

Alejandra *very worried and distressed*: Mum, dad ... I'm pregnant.

Father *standing up, shocked and visibly angry*: What?! And who's the father?

Alejandra *distressed, but holding tight*: ... one of Ricardo's cousins, who's back from Lima.

Father: So you've just met him?! But what kind of daughter have I got?!?

Mother *making father sit down*: Calm down.

Alejandra: Forgive me dad, forgive me the two of you. I just didn't think of you, I didn't think of myself. I just didn't think at all.

Mother: We'll help you out, in anything you may need.

Alejandra: And what about you dad?

Father *he stops to think for a while and then carries on*: I'll support you too.

Alejandra: Thank you.

(ElCLDr, 11'17")

*At Alejandra's home. Alejandra, with a visibly pregnant belly, is sitting down having a conversation with her friend José.*

José *grabbing Alejandra's hand*: Listen to me Alejandra. You know that I've always loved you. I want to marry you, take responsibility for this child and give it my name.

Alejandra: Are you sure of what you're saying?

José: I'm absolutely certain; and I'll love this baby very much, I will.

Alejandra: But please don't ask too much of me just yet; with time I will learn to love you.

José: Don't you worry, I love you. *José and Alejandra hug tenderly.*

(ElCLDr, 12'03")

Alejandra, pregnant from a stranger from the big city, who took advantage of the friendly network of local peers to then run away, gets full support from her parents, and welcomes the proposal made by her friend José to marry her and become the child's father. This positioning of pregnancy appears ideal, probably a bit too idyllic. Let us have a look at what happened when this story was presented in public,

Ana (presenter): As you have just seen in the drama, the girl (Alejandra) trusted the boy from the big city (Santiago) and he got her pregnant. But the other boy (Jose), who was in love with her and lived in the village, took pity on her and ... any questions?

Hebe (audience): Does this happen often in your community?

Ana (presenter): Well, no; not often ...  
(ElCLDrQ, Q1)

After the presentation of the drama the very first question asked to the creators of the drama, was to reflect on the truthfulness of the story. Hebe's exercise of a 'reality check' acts as collective filter <sup>s6</sup>. But more importantly, it helps to build a picture of what adolescents outline as an ideal world with respect to the issue of being pregnant.

The cases of Pamela and Alejandra (despite the overt fairy-tale tones of the latter) provide clues to piecing together the dilemma between the morality of abortion, the consequences of adolescent motherhood and the legitimacy – especially within the family- of adolescent pregnancy. Family (and community) understanding and support are paramount, although there seems to be very little of it in everyday life. Individual choice appears subordinated to family support. The adolescents' appeal for improved mutual understanding and communication among family members ran across the treatment of the issue of pregnancy. Nevertheless, cases of abortion populated (and over-populated) the dramas produced and presented by the adolescents. Abortion is enacted and problematised as a highly conflictive issue. On one hand, it is portrayed as the harsh, almost necessary, reminder of family misunderstanding and neglect. On the other hand, it appears as depraved and is vilified and pushed to the fringes of morality. More interestingly however, the practice of abortion seems to circulate among the adolescents in a

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<sup>6</sup> Instances like the one performed by Hebe and Ana, in which a built-in triangulation of facts is carried out, were multiple and frequent. Hebe's case is a good example of explicit, direct check. In other cases, boos and non verbal manifestations of disbelief challenged the speakers and cornered them into providing additional reasons in support of their claims, taking back what was said, qualifying their statements or also, sticking to them.



surprisingly fluid fashion, and it provokes almost instantaneous debate any time it gets spelt out. In the following section we will address this fundamental corner of being pregnant.

### II.3.2 Concluding pregnancy

Terminating the pregnancy proved to be the most widely considered feature of the condition of being pregnant, despite the wealth of conflict that surrounded the matter. Abortion was talked about at length and heatedly debated, especially in its moral dimension. Above all, abortion was shown and discussed as a widely performed practice. In this section, we will look at the ways in which the practice of abortion was enacted and problematised in the dramas and discussions.

#### *Deciding to terminate*

In the Diana and Synthia case, Synthia is desolated; she goes to Diana's house and bangs on the door in desperation. The first part of the talk about pregnancy is rough; Diana turns her back on her friend. To Synthia's insistence, Diana proposes a termination of the pregnancy.

*Synthia is standing by the front door of her friend Diana's house.*

Synthia *banging on the door in desperation*: Diana... Diana...

Diana please help me. Diana you've got to help me.

Diana *opening the door*: Synthia, you know what? I've thought about your situation. You have to have an abortion.

Synthia: What?!?!

Diana: Yes, what you just heard. I know a person that charges three hundred Soles. If you manage to get the money I'll try to take you over there today.

Synthia: No! I can't do it!

Diana: It's the only way out; so that your aunt and everyone around won't have anything to talk about, so that they don't get upset. No one should know, otherwise what are they going to say to you?!?!

Synthia: But I can't do it. How could I do it? It's an unwanted child but ... I can't do it.

Diana: But the child is a bastard child!!

*Long silence*

Synthia: No Diana, please help me!

Diana: Synthia I've already made myself clear. It is the only way out. We'll go there this very afternoon.

*Long silence.*

Synthia: All right.

(ArtADr, 14'18")

Diana's clarity in coming up with a plan gives strong indication of the depth and articulation of the underground world of termination of pregnancies; indeed, there seems to be plenty of knowledge on the practice of clandestine abortion. Moreover, this knowledge necessitates additional competence and familiarity to enter it, let alone to utilise it. But Diana shows such skills; she is able to plan an access to the system of clandestine abortion, to read its codes, to manage its demands, and to do everything in a co-ordinated fashion.

Diana brings up an important source of pressure in addition to family (i.e. Synthia's aunt and guardian); the source moves from the singular to the plural. It is a plural with a sense of infiniteness, including all-others and adding a further source of multiple pressures. The multiplicity is double, many people, many pressures. Diana illustrates the array of pressures: *what* will they say? *How* will they feel? What will they say to *Synthia*? An unintended pregnancy triggers stories, hurts people and finally lands on the pregnant adolescent. But the baby is already there; it is an unwanted baby but nevertheless it is enough of a reason to convince Synthia that the pregnancy should continue. Diana then, unleashes a final blow to Synthia's argument. First, she saturates Synthia's qualification to an extreme: the baby is a bastard. Second, she neutralises any possible manoeuvre by Synthia via a final appeal to exclusivity: Synthia has to terminate because there are no alternative solutions.

### *Accessing the abortion network*

A first important step in the process of carrying out an abortion is the identification and activation of the abortion network, and more importantly, the identification of a viable point to enter the network. Although it can be inferred from the abortion figures in Peru<sup>7</sup> that there is a broad network of abortion operating in the country, identifying and accessing this network is riddled with hurdles. In the passages that follow, two pairs of friends – Pamela and Melissa and Amanda and Nancy, discuss the nuances of working their way into the abortion network. There is a battery of issues at stake: confidentiality, finances, time pressure, contacts, commitment and basic risks:

*Sitting at a table in a café/bar in the village, Pamela and Melissa are having a conversation over a soft drink.*

Pamela visibly distressed: Melissa, it's about me. Please help me.

Melissa: I'm afraid I can't help you but I have a friend who's had an abortion and knows about it.

Pamela: Melissa, please help me. You've got to take me to see her.

Melissa: Well, I don't know.

Pamela: Oh, please!!

Melissa: All right, let's give it a try. Let's go and see her.

Pamela: Yes.

(HuaLDr, 16'58")

*Sitting at the doorstep, Amanda and Nancy discuss Nancy's problem.*

Nancy: [...] and what am I going to do?!? You've got to help me. Please, help me.

Amanda: And why don't you go over to a midwife?

Nancy: Mmmm, yes. But I need the money. This has to stay between you and me. No one else has to know about it, not even our friends. No one. Not even your parents or mine. It'll stay between you and me.

Amanda: I can help you with a midwife.

Nancy: Good, I'll be counting on you.

Amanda: OK I'll take you. You don't need cry any more.

(CanLDr, 15' 54")

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<sup>7</sup> Although there is controversy regarding the level of adolescent abortions in Peru, where abortion is illegal and information on prevalence is highly problematic, existing estimates oscillate between 25 and 50% of births (INEI, 1997a, 1997b and Barrig, 1993). A study by the Allan Guttmacher Institute (1996), which has been acknowledged as a valid and reliable source by Peru's Institute of Statistics (INEI), concludes that 42.89 abortions take place every year in Peru for every 100 births.

A first important point evident in the three examples is the open *commitment to help* made by the friends, to the pregnant girls. With the statement of the commitment to help, two important operations get concomitantly accomplished. First, it opens up a space of priceless value for the pregnant girls, within which the handling of the unintended pregnancy, which so far has been a private nightmare, becomes an issue that can be shared in conversation; it moves from being an inner state to become a shared concern. Within an awful background of constrictive and exclusionary illegitimacy, there appears a kernel of solidarity, a very important one. Second, and following from the first point, by committing help and hence opening up this space to voice possible solutions to an unintended pregnancy, the *issue gets shaped, and not merely expressed*.

The passage from inner state to shared concern does not just mean a verbalisation of what something that was already 'sitting in the mind' of the women, but rather the beginning of the construction of a blurred, although highly pressing anxiety. With the manifested commitment to help, the activation of the network of abortion has taken its first step. From now on, the status of termination of pregnancy moves from individual nightmare to social plan. However incipient this may be at this stage, the kernel of the activation lies well in the inner circle of social support of the pregnant adolescent, that it, it sparks in co-operation with a close friend.

Once the commitment to help is secured, action begins to flow. In particular, the activation of the network moves from plan to operational steps. For example, the preliminary mapping of the network which Melissa carries out for Pamela not only provides her with factual information about it but also, and probably more importantly, it constitutes a first 'visualisation' of a solution to her problem. Melissa's description is at the same time representation and action. For Pamela the decision to terminate her

pregnancy receives a crucial twist forwards the moment she grasps the actual opportunity to enter the network of abortion as presented by her friend.

*Going through the network of abortion*

Going to the place where the abortion will be performed and contacting the person who will do it seems to follow a set pattern. The friends arrive to the house where the termination will be carried out. As the first contact between seeker and provider takes place, there seems to be a tacit acknowledgment of the roles and each party's interests. Let us look into it.

*Amanda and Nancy are standing by a big entrance door, which is closed. Amanda knocks. A woman opens the door.*

Woman: Who are you looking for?

Amanda: Is this the midwife's house? Is it here?

Woman: Yes, and what type of consultation are you after?

Amanda: Well ... errrrr ... my friend and I wanted to ask ... Well, it's a problem that has happened. My friend is very worried and we don't know what to do.

Woman: OK. I'm the midwife's sister but you can count on me. I know this business and I can help you.

Nancy: But please do it now. I can't carry on this way. I'm desperate; my parents don't know I'm pregnant. Please you've got to do it urgently.

Woman: OK. Come on in.

*Girls go into the house.*

(CanLDr, 16' 45")

*Synthia and Diana arrive to the doctor's address and knock at the door.*

Diana: Doctor, we're here because we've got a problem ... my friend is not feeling well, and ...

Doctor: What is bothering you?

Diana: She's pregnant and we'd like to get your help.

Doctor: And how could I help? What could I do?

Diana: Well, I've told my friend that she has to have an abortion.

Doctor: So you want to have an abortion. Do you know what you're saying?

*Long silence.*

Doctor: First, abortion is a serious criminal offence, you can go to jail for it. Even I'd go to jail. *As doctor speaks there's a close-up on a wall where it reads 'Doctor Chaplin. Opening hours Monday to*

*Friday from 3:00 to 5:00'. And there are other dangers involved, even death. Long silence.*

Synthia: Doctor please, ... I don't know what to do. If my aunt finds out she'll kick me out of the house and I've got no parents. So please take this trouble off me, please help me.

Doctor: I'd love to help you but ...

Synthia: Please doctor!!

Doctor: I'm putting my professional career at risk; I wouldn't do it for a few hundred soles [...] All right I'll help you but first you'll have to sign here, OK?

Synthia: OK.

Doctor: I'm not taking any responsibilities in case something goes wrong.

Synthia: Yes doctor.

*Synthia sits on a stretcher.*

*(ArtLDr, 18'37")*

In all the dramas where a decision to terminate was taken, the actual practice of termination led to a negative outcome. The adolescents either died in the intervention or their health suffered substantially (e.g. complications leading to infertility). The enactment of termination showed a detailed account of a widespread underground practice as much as a string of 'bad' endings.

Termination seems to transit through a damned, although necessary, path. On one hand, there are the many actors and nodes in the termination network, so frequently activated, so clearly portrayed, so vividly transited. On the other hand, there is the moral haunt, a kind of metaphysical bewitchment that condemns with no piety. Unravelling the dilemma of abortion proved to be too exacting a challenge for the adolescents enacting and problematising it. The sheer factuality of the practice combined with the bold moral disapproval and the overwhelming subjective torment make of termination a territory far too mined to be transited without getting hurt. The dialogical journey through it, however, succeeded in unearthing a few of these dangerous mines.

## **II.4 Enacting and problematising pregnancy: stories of observation and action**

The lengthy excursion into the experience of pregnancy delivered a very rich picture of the phenomenon that most intensely captivated the attention of the adolescents enacting and problematising stories of sexuality. Pregnancy digs its root into the depth of the community, in the community's traditions, practices and order. Firmly anchored in the local reality, pregnancy circulates among the networks of communication that connect adolescents to the place they live, to others, and to themselves.

Circulating among these networks appears to be challenging. More often than not, it turns out to be near impossible for pregnancy to legitimately transit the networks. More often than not, pregnancy appears either confined to the fringes, driven underground or denied altogether. However, pregnancy inhabits the human domain, impregnating the agency of impregnated humans. As such, pregnancy must not be understood as just a passive fact that gets allocated a space (or no space); rather, its social positioning is constantly negotiated among the members of the community in which the phenomenon occurs. In these processes of social negotiation, local traditions, norms and perceptions are drawn in. So pregnancy becomes, as the adolescents have so colourfully illustrated, a matter that generates debate on the features of the local culture that allow or exclude it, on the validity of the local norms that legitimise or invalidate it, and on people's attitudes that welcome or reject it.

Following closely the treatment given by the adolescents to the phenomenon of pregnancy, has helped us understand a bit more the ways in which it is both enacted and problematised in conversation. In a fashion similar to the exploration of the community carried out in chapter five, and the exploration of the networks of communication introduced in chapter six, the investigation

of pregnancy presented here, constitutes an example of the multiplicity of significations that emerge from collective participation in the creation and realisation of stories by the adolescents in their local communities, and from the sharing and discussion of these stories with adolescents belonging to other communities. These emerging significations benefit immensely from the continuous interplay of, and exchange between, the perspectives of actor and observer derived precisely from adolescent participation in both the production of the stories and the critical examination of them.

Although the same methodology was applied to the case of the exploration of the community and the networks of communication, the experience of pregnancy benefited particularly from this actor-observer interplay and exchange. While there is indeed a wealth to learn from the collective representation and problematisation of the community, and from the critical enactment and problematisation of networks of communication, the enactment and problematisation of the experience of pregnancy enabled the adolescents to take part in this issue both as actors and as observers. For example, the exploration of *becoming* pregnant or *being* pregnant would have very likely escaped a net made up exclusively of conversation among observers. The critical eye with which the adolescents discussed and problematised peer, family or community constriction and exclusion of pregnant girls was precisely anchored in the very experiences that they themselves created and enacted in the dramas. The same applies to the exploration of the decision-making processes that dealt with the dilemmas of abortion, communication with the family, and personal freedom.

The adolescents who took part in these stories of pregnancy drew on symbolic and material resources from the everyday life of the local communities, in the collective creation and realisation of the stories. Events, norms, and experiences enacted belong to the infinite repertoire of knowledge locally available to the adolescents. Moreover, the sharing of the stories with



adolescents from other communities puts *local truths* in perspective, subjecting them, more often than not, to a necessary argumentative process of collective validation, during which the things that are taken for granted are called into question; points of view get contrasted, attacked and defended and, often crystallised ideas become fluid, and then evaporate or re-crystallise again.

Finally, the experience of pregnancy that this chapter has explored is made up of the experiences, the life histories of hundreds of adolescents that took part in this investigation. It has benefited from the wealth of creativity that these boys and girls unleashed both at the time of producing their own dramas and later on, at the time of critically scrutinising each other's work. Pregnancy, as the many passages from dramas and discussions show, constitutes an especially meaningful subject in the lives of these young men and women. But, probably more importantly, these passages give testimony to an impressive process of being and becoming, not just pregnant, but aware of the ever-present possibility for change. Angelita, a young woman speaking on behalf of her peers at one of the SaRA workshops summarised the experience in beautifully and succinctly: "We're extremely pleased and proud to be part of SaRA. We have learned a great deal about our Peruvian communities, about our sexuality, about ourselves, and most importantly, about each other".

# Chapter 8

## Conclusions

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section one provides a brief synopsis of the thesis, highlighting the key issues addressed in each chapter, and summarising the research questions guiding the study, the theoretical architecture underpinning the investigation, the research strategy followed to address the research questions, and the empirical findings of the thesis. Section two then engages in conceptual discussion, with two key objectives. First, it will revisit the theoretical framework introduced in chapter three from the vantage point of the empirical findings. In particular, it will articulate further the concept of adolescent participation, weaving into it the fruits of the systematic observation of adolescents taking part in sexual health promotion. Second, it will go back to the issue of adolescent sexual health, enhancing this discussion in light of the empirical findings; here, special attention will be paid to the understanding of sexual health that emerges from adolescents taking part in its promotion. Finally, section three will review limitations and benefits of this study.

### **1. A synopsis of the thesis**

The thesis has addressed the issue of participatory adolescent sexual health promotion. Adolescent sexual health is an area that captures the attention of a wide variety of audiences, from the general public to policy makers, from practitioners to researchers; it cuts across countries and across continents, occupying an important public space and igniting a multitude of unresolved controversies. From the issue of sexually transmitted infections among young people, to the levels of adolescent pregnancies, to the social consequences of teenage motherhood (and fatherhood), the sexual lives of young people have

been put under the microscope throughout the latter half of the last century, and there is little evidence that this will tendency will wane. Countless human and material resources are poured daily into promoting the sexual health of adolescents, and a good deal of these is channelled into so-called, participatory promotion.

Participatory adolescent sexual health promotion enjoys a privileged status, stemming from the combination of an alleged effectiveness and correctness. Promoting in participatory ways, it is argued, delivers results and, moreover, it does so appropriately. This very bold statement, espoused by individuals and organisations involved in health promotion across the world, benefits from the likewise positive association of participation with the values of democracy. However, there seems to be considerably more good-willed enthusiasm for participatory promotion, than consistent theoretical and empirical validation of it<sup>1</sup>. It is precisely this gap in our understanding of participatory promotion of adolescent sexual health that motivated me to carry out the study presented here. In particular, I was driven by an interest in obtaining a better conceptual grasp of participation, a notion that magnetically draws policy makers and practitioners, while failing to attract scholarly attention with equal fervour.

A first step taken in the thesis was aimed at unravelling what lies behind participatory adolescent sexual health promotion, by looking into some of the underlying debates, particularly those regarding the three highly problematic pillars on which the issue stands: the concepts of *adolescent*, *adolescent sexual and reproductive health*, and *participatory approaches* to promotion (chapter two). Briefly, it was suggested that there are fundamental problems at the root of

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing these pages, UNICEF is actively working, on UN mandate, on the preparation of the Special Session of UN General Assembly in 2001 for the follow-up to the 1990 World-Summit for Children (UN General Assembly Resolution 54/93). The session, to be held in New York on 19-21 September 2001, has already identified a three-point action plan, as follows: 1. 'The best possible start in life for all children'; 2. 'A good-quality basic

contemporary understandings of participatory adolescent sexual health promotion. First, the adolescent appears to be understood as inevitably transiting towards adulthood from the very moment he leaves childhood; an overshadowing concern with the end state adulthood constricts and governs adolescents' transit to adulthood. Second, adolescent sexual and reproductive health appears marked indelibly by the adult hegemonic conceptualisation at the root of the notion of adolescence. Knowledge regarding these issues contributes to further develop a constrictive notion of adolescence, in line with the prescriptions laid down by the overarching discourse of transit into adulthood. Third, underpinning the theory and practice of participatory adolescent sexual and reproductive health promotion, adolescent participation is understood of as a process of adult transmission of knowledge on to the participating adolescent.

Chapter three addressed, from a conceptual angle, the problems identified in chapter two at the root of participatory adolescent sexual health promotion. In a nutshell, it proposed, by generating a dialogue between the works of Jürgen Habermas and Paulo Freire, an understanding of adolescent participation as a process of collective creation. It elaborated an approach to the concept of participation that exploits Habermas's and Freire's argument on the reflexivity potential present in communicative practices, and conceives of *participation as a social process of creation through which those taking part shape knowledge as much as social relations as much as themselves*. Understanding participation as a social process of creation rather than as a process of transmission, it was suggested, allows us to overcome the problematic nature of the conceptualisations of adolescence, adolescent sexual health, and participation discussed in chapter two.

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education for all children'; and 3. '*The opportunities for all children, especially adolescents, for meaningful participation in their communities*' (UNICEF, 2001; my emphasis).

The following chapter, chapter four, introduced the methodological steps designed and implemented to explore empirically the conceptualisation of participatory adolescent sexual health promotion elaborated in chapter three. Briefly, the research strategy was to examine this conceptual architecture by building it into the design and implementation of a participatory adolescent sexual health promotion *initiative* (project SaRA). This initiative allowed for the systematic observation in practice of the conceptual claims elaborated in chapter three. The data gathered for empirical exploration was qualitative and, as summarised in table 4.1 in chapter four, consisted of 24 sequences of video story (documentaries and dramas), presentation of story, and discussion of story, which were elicited and arranged for empirical analysis.

Chapter five presented the results of the first of three empirical analyses. It discussed adolescents' collective elaborations of their relationship with their immediate life environment. This was done via analysing 8 sequences of documentary/presentation of documentary/discussion the documentary carried out by the adolescents. Two "stories of community" emerged from the analysis of the eight sequences: the *story of development* in which the adolescents put forward an understanding of the place they live in as in inevitable motion towards betterment; and the *story of survival*, in which the adolescents re-create their community as a place of everyday struggle to continue to exist. These two stories, it was proposed, signify the crystallisation of a long process of exploration and creation through which the adolescents came to a collective understanding not only on what appear to be the salient features of their immediate environment, but also on the main normative elements that regulate social interactions in the community, and what impact these community features and norms have on them and vice versa. As discussed in chapter five, the stories of community are in a circular relationship with the adolescents. On the one hand, they are complete collective adolescent *creations*, achievements of the young men and women who took part in producing them. On the other hand, the stories provide the

adolescents with an internally generated and internally validated set of *anchors* that enable them to make sense of, maintain and strengthen their relationship with the places they live in, with the people they live with, and with themselves. Taking part in the process of unearthing, conceptualising and debating their communities meant not only coming together to share an experience; more importantly, it meant becoming actively related to the practices, values and resources that the community offers to -and demands from- its members. The explorations of the authorities, the school and the market presented in chapter five are, just to name a few, vivid examples of this process of active engagement of the adolescents with their communities.

Chapters six and seven introduced the results of the second and third empirical analyses. In this case, the material observed was made up of 16 sequences of drama/presentation of drama/discussion the drama carried out by the adolescents. Chapter six unearthed and explored the family and peers, as the two central networks of communication in adolescents' lives. Very briefly, while the family appears to provide the adolescents with, often constrictive, *blueprints for guidance* through life, peers offer easily accessible *ammunition for coping*, in the quest for facing everyday challenges. More importantly, as seen in the analysis of the stories of community, adolescents' elaborations of family and peers as central networks of communication constitute both a collective *achievement* of the adolescents, as much as a shared *resource* that supports the young women and men in stabilising social relationships. Further, the numerous examples of the adolescents' debates on the family and peers as networks of communications discussed in chapter six, give rich evidence of the scope and strength of the creational element of participation; in taking part in enacting and debating these networks of communication, the adolescents transited them time and again, gaining awareness of their characteristics, shaping them, developing them further, and connecting them to the broader community.

Finally, chapter seven concentrated on adolescents' experience of the pregnancy. In this respect, the adolescents collectively elaborated and problematised pregnancy as a phenomenon with deep roots in the community, in its traditions, practices and order. Further, pregnancy appeared to constantly haunt the very notion of a pregnant adolescent, as participants struggled to legitimise pregnancy both within the everyday life environment of the community and through the networks of communication that bind them to it. Again, as in the case of the elaborations of community and of networks of communication, the collective reflections on pregnancy placed the young men and women in a circular relationship: while the elaborations of pregnancy were an achievement of the participating adolescents, they also fed back to the adolescents as resources that anchored them to the place they live in, the people they live with and the identities they live within. As the examples of the adolescents' discussions on the manifold struggle that surrounds pregnancy discussed in chapter seven have shown, taking part in the enactment and problematisation of pregnancy meant not only engaging actively with the issue of pregnancy, but more importantly, it meant locating pregnancy -and learning to address it- within the knowledge, values and social networks of the community.

Now that the central features of the investigation have been summarised, what I propose is to revisit the thesis' main claim: the understanding of participatory adolescent sexual health promotion as a process of creation. The conceptually goal here is double: to reconstruct the process of adolescent participation, and to relocate adolescents' elaborations of sexual health, in light of the systematic observation of adolescents taking part in sexual health promotion.

## **2. Reflections on the thesis' findings**

There are two broad vectors on which the findings of this thesis unfold. On one side, there is the knowledge on sexual health yielded by systematic observation of the collective elaborations carried out by the adolescents engaged in participation processes. On the other side, there is the knowledge on participatory promotion processes as such brought together by the systematic observation of a field implementation of one such participatory promotion initiative. So far, the attention dedicated to these two vectors has privileged the treatment of each separately; little effort has been invested towards an integration of the two. In the coming sections I will first return to the conceptual argument of participatory promotion and revisit it in light of the empirical explorations carried out in chapters five, six and seven (2.1). I will then move on and address once again the issue of adolescent sexual health, but this time the elaborations will be made primarily through the conceptual lenses of adolescent participation advanced in this study (2.2).

### **2.1 Remarks and observations of participation processes**

The processes of authoring, performing, filming, showing and discussing a story, whose content was analysed along chapters five, six and seven, generate, from a social psychological stance, what may be construed as waves of *conversational perspectives*. In particular, these waves sway time and again between first-second person patterns, that is, I-you or we-you; and third person patterns, that is, he, she, they or it. These conversational perspectives change, endless times, from one to the other and back again. The analyses introduced in chapters five, six and seven give abundant evidence of this.

Changes in conversational perspectives, characterised by changes in the usage of personal pronouns, have a significant impact at the level of action. Let us look at this aspect closer. The adolescents constantly (and eagerly) moved



from *enacting* issues of everyday life in the dramas, to *arguing about* these enacted issues in the discussions of the dramas. For example, problems like the normative closeness of the family or the intricacies of the network of abortion were colourfully enacted in the dramas; later, these problems were heatedly problematised in the discussions. The point to be raised here is that the issues enacted by the adolescents (e.g. family or abortion) were brought to the fore in the dramas as themes in need of agreement between parties in interaction –for example, a father and a son– who attempted to resolve a problem –for example, on an unintended pregnancy. In the discussions, on the other hand, the enactment of the issue –i.e. the interaction between the father and the son regarding a problem with a pregnancy– was objectified, it was made visible; as if the adolescents taking part in the discussions had been observing the unfolding interaction between the father and the son from right behind their backs. What was once a *theme* in need of agreement between two parties addressing each other in an I-you relationship, became an *object* of argumentation to be addressed from the perspective of a third person.

Constant changes in conversational perspective produces an array of effects. A first important consequence is that the shifting between performance and objectification, between action and observation, between doing and commentary, becomes fluid. This fluidisation, in turn, opens up a particular reflexive space. The adolescents moving back and forth between the position of actor and observer do so within a horizon of issues that are internally connected to their own repertoires, as they are the creators of the stories. In short, a potential for reflexivity arises from the condensation in the same individuals of the double position of the actor who experiences from the inside, and the observer who experiences from the outside.

This process of fluid exchange of perspectives has, in turn, an impact on the relationship between the subject, now understood in the double position of actor and observer, and the world; to put it in Habermasian terms, between

the three worlds of subjective, social and factual realities. In particular, the constant alternating of perspectives vis-à-vis 'familiar' worlds impacts on *the ability* of the subject to position herself before the worlds, as either an actor acting upon the worlds or an observer reflecting on these worlds. The process of *becoming aware* of the change in perspective, I want to propose, has an impact on the competence of the speaking and acting subject to embed communication within these worlds. To a large extent this process exposes itself as it unfolds; participants move from merely *knowing how* to change perspective (which they master intuitively), to *knowing that* there is a change, and this change gives rise to an array of consequences.

A special feature of becoming aware of this change in perspective, of the double position of actor and observer that has condensed in *oneself*, is that this awareness does not develop within isolated individuals, but within a group; and moreover within a group that is experiencing simultaneously from the inside and from the outside. Both *oneself* as much as *all others* are in a position to turn into actors as much as observers as much as social objects. That is, the notions of self and other become metaphorically interchangeable via the simultaneous and constantly reflexive, back and forth exchange of actor and observer perspectives, and via becoming an object of observation. This exchange of self and other positions, puts in circulation a relationship of empathy that, as repeatedly illustrated in the empirical analyses, transits through the collective argumentative *sharing* of experiences which, while scrutinised by 'observing selves', are at the same time enacted by 'acting selves'.

This instance of empathetic connection is by no means a novel phenomenon. On the contrary, it has a long history among those studying literature, theatre, cinema, television, etc. who have explored at length the processes of identification by the audience with the actors. In our case however, this instance has undergone, at least, a treble twist. First, the actors performing in

the stories told are none other than the observers; there is a perpetual metaphorical switch between stage and seat, or in this case, between screen and seat. Second, the stories told are the *creation* of the audience (and the actors). Third, the setting in which the stories unfold are the everyday life environment of the audience. This three-way connectivity saturates the observers' identification with the story told, thus placing his or her agency in a privileged position in relation to the said story.<sup>2</sup>

The audience, simultaneously actors, observers, and observed, are thus in a key position to take part in elaborating on the folds of the story. Here however, and going beyond the classical understanding of the relationship of identification between audience and actors, elaborations by the audience are not just psychological events experienced in a passive role. They are also, and more importantly, social actions performed by a deliberative audience; an audience that, in discussing and problematising stories, acts upon these very stories, which are in fact slices of the worlds of the audience themselves. Certainly, the argumentative audience acts upon *stories* and not upon *reality*. These stories nonetheless, as seen in the documentaries about the community or in the dramas about sexuality, are made up of real life scenarios and plots, constituting a sound platform for argumentation<sup>3</sup>. Further, and crucially, what is deliberated by the argumentative audience is precisely the very *experience* of the audience themselves, since the subjects that make up the audience also created the stories in the first place. Here, the term experience refers to the stock of knowledge collectively thematised by the subjects

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<sup>2</sup> This saturated identification of the actor/observer with the story created/observed benefits immensely from the audio-visual medium in which the story was created (and it is observed). The audio-visual medium acts as an 'extended' language with the potential to substantially enhance the communication process of the adolescents taking part in the creation and discussion of stories. For a detailed discussion of the characteristics and implications on communication processes using audio-visual media see Lorac and Weiss (1981), Humphreys and Lorac (2001) and Humphreys *et al.* (2001).

<sup>3</sup> The reader may recall from chapter seven, the constant reality check that the audience exercised on the stories told; a kind of built-in triangulation that put under the spotlight attempts to circulate unwarranted accounts. The many instances of booing or other

constituting the audience. Let us now breakdown the process via which these subjects generate and 'shake up' their collective experience, the process via which a collective production of 'unity' is achieved by the participating subjects. We will do so by paying particular attention to the constant to and fro between action and observation, that takes place along the process of collectively thinking of what story to tell, to collectively deliberating on the stories told.

*Objectifying the world within: from action to observation*

An initial step in the collective experiencing of the world is the exercise of thinking of a story to tell (i.e. the documentaries and the dramas). Here, the participants first have to separate themselves from a crystallised world, the world within which they act. This process of preliminary detachment, which was often lubricated by curiosity or frustration, focuses on slices of the world that affect the creators' lives. As seen in the empirical analyses, this instance is situated in the everyday life atmosphere of the adolescents taking part. As such, the first objectification steps bear the weight of a world that acts upon the participant, rather than vice versa; objectifying fractions of the world, within which the participants act, becomes hence the first stop in a long journey.

*Enacting the objectified world: from observation to action*

As part of the process of creating the stories the participants subsequently debate about the slices of objectified world, and in doing so the world begins to acquire further levels of complexity. First, as the creative process of producing a story is a collective one, the participants have to agree on the story; what story to choose, what to tell, what morale it will have, etc. The first clashes of points of view and perspectives appear, probably instigating the first opportunities for taking up the role of other in the process of

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expressions of disapproval give testimony of an audience that watches as much as deliberates and argues.

argumentation. Second, once the story has been thought out, the process of re-creating, of enacting it, brings in challenges about the 'produced' nature of a story vis-à-vis the 'real' nature of the world. Here there is probably a first collective shake to the notions of 'produced' story versus 'real' world; the first suggestions of the real nature of the produced and the produced nature of the real begin to sprout. As examples we have the instances of negotiating spaces and people for filming, shooting on location, editing the footage filmed in the field, etc. In the instance of re-creation of the story, the world, or better said the slice of world that is part of the designed story, becomes a *performed world*, and not any more an observed world.

*Telling stories: from action to observation*

The world is later presented in the story told, or better said, in the video shown. Now the story has been uprooted from the location and the instance of creation, and has been relocated in a different social space and social time<sup>4</sup>. The telling of the story coincides with the first instance of enactment by the observing audience. Two processes occur simultaneously: the social process of telling and the social process of observing. It is an interactive monologue, or to an extent, a quasi-dialogue. In the process of re-locating the story in time and space, the commentary added, the framings, expansions, qualifications, contradictions, additions, etc. all become part of this relocation.

As the presentations of stories unfold, the process of empathetic identification discussed above begins to unfold. Further, while there is identification taking place on the side of the audience, there is another process at stake on the side of the presenting party (and it should be remembered that everyone taking part is at some point a presenting party). For those presenting the story, the

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<sup>4</sup>The reader may recall from chapter four, that the actual playing of the story to the audience was carried out by the adolescents from the vantage point of stalls set up by them in corners of the main hall where the workshops took place. These stalls could probably be understood as providing a 'placenta' environment for attenuating the effects of the uprooting without triggering defensive retreats into the local. Further, the stalls were equal spaces, created collectively in conditions of equality.

world re-created in the story ceases to be real and becomes hypothetical. This hypothesising of the world is latent here but it will become explicit later. It could be said that while the audience *enters* the story, that is, it comes to experience it from the *inside* (via the identification with the characters), the presenting party *exits* the story, shifting to a position of observation from the *outside* (here outside is a bold term, via the uprooting of the story from the point of production and re-rooting into the point of transmission).

*Reflecting on the stories: from observation to action*

Finally, there is the instance of *critical observation*, of commentary: the question time. Here the world is hypothetical par excellence; it is in full an objectified world that is acted upon by a critical audience. Everyone is an observer here, a critical observer (as much as a problematiser). However, by now, everyone has also been a performer, an actor, and a creator. The turn taking in the presentation allows for everyone to identify with characters in stories (as many times as there are stories told, including the one told by themselves), and to be an observer of their own stories. In this instance, the original real world that fed the process of creation of the stories has undergone a long transformation articulated in the conception of the story, in the production of the story, in the telling of the story, and in the discussion of the story. In Freire's terms, along this process of transformation the world ceases to be a given and becomes an opportunity. The subjects that created, told, observed and commented the stories have also undergone a long process of transformation.

The relationship between the subject and the world has changed many times: an observer of the original world, who, drawing on feeling, selects a slice of world to put under scrutiny; a critical observer of the world, who takes part in a collective process of conception and production of the story which re-creates the original world (here treating the world hypothetically, acting upon it from the perspective of the observer); a performer of the world in the story, acting

upon it as an actor and not as an observer; a story teller, relating the world to others, treating it again from the observer perspective; an 'identified' performer of the world, acting upon it as an actor, by identification with the protagonists in the story; finally, and again, a critical observer of the world, who takes part in a collective process of re-design and re-production of the story which re-creates the 'told' world (treating the world hypothetically, acting upon it from the perspective of the observer).

In conclusion, the detailed breakdown of this back and forth process of being an actor and an observer, as much as social object empathetically identifying with others (and with oneself), can be understood as a *collective exercise in de-centering*. As such, this exercise concentrates the three main conceptual constructions proposed in this thesis, that is, the adolescent as a social actor, participation as a process of creation, and sexual health as knowledge circulating in the community. Let us revisit these three issues briefly.

The collective exercise in de-centering is carried out repeatedly by hundreds of adolescents involved in it, creating, telling, and problematising dozens of stories. The adolescents here appear to provide a sound example of Freire's concept of the active learner, discussed in chapter three. Far from passive recipients of information, the adolescents vividly illustrate the notion of social actors, that is, subjects with agency who are able to do and undo, to shape the social and material environment at the same time they themselves are shaped by the very processes they are engaged in.

In accomplishing this collective exercise in de-centering, the adolescents taking part constantly moved, as we have seen in the paragraphs above, between action and observation. There are two aspects of this movement that is important to distinguish here: pure movement and ripening movement. The *pure* aspect of movement is made up by permanent back and forth between observation and action. The second aspect of movement, that is, the

*ripening* movement, refers to the acquisition of competencies by the collective of adolescents. It points towards the process of development of reflexivity, that is, the principal achievement of a creational process of participation. In other words, the ripening aspect of movement at the heart of the collective exercise in de-centering colourfully illustrates Paulo Freire's concept of the development of critical consciousness or *conscientização*.

Finally, flowing through and with this processes of pure and ripening movement, transiting within the collective exercise in de-centering, there are the likewise collective stories of sexuality and community. These stories are unique examples of the knowledge of community, sexuality and sexual health that is in currency in the places where the adolescents live, the places they belong to. The stories are fed by the knowledge in circulation in their communities, and in turn, they feed back on to these. As such the stories constitute the stabilising unity that both binds and bonds those involved in creating them, that is, the adolescent women and men. The stories of community and sexuality illustrate the role played by dialogue and communication in both crystallising and renewing knowledge.

These stories, which so far have been kept in the background, will become the focus of reflection in the coming section. We will revisit them in order to piece together the local knowledge of sexual health that emerges from and circulates within the lives of the adolescents taking part.

## **2.2 Language, communication, sexuality and sexual health**

So far I have dissected the *processes* underpinning adolescent participation in the promotion of their sexual health. I have also identified some implications of these processes, above all, the collective exercise in de-centering by participants who, via transiting fluidly the perspectives of actor, observer and



social object, are in a position to relate reflexively to the world, which is understood as a subjective, social and factual reality. I will now focus on the light these reflections shed on the issue of adolescent sexual health.

This collective exercise in de-centering affects all three relations of the subject to the world: her subjective world of 'inner' experience, the social world of interactions with others, and the world out there – that which is agreed upon at a given point in time and space. The adolescents taking part with others in the creation, enactment, presentation and discussion of documentaries and dramas underwent this de-centering experience, via communicating in a language of their own, through stories that directly and indirectly addressed sexual health. Let us revisit these stories by putting them together.

There are two central issues about adolescent sexual health that arise from the integration and further abstraction of the findings elaborated in chapters five, six and seven. The first issue relates to the normative dimension of sexual health; the second, to the over-ground life of those elements of sexuality that are driven underground by the prevailing values, norms and actions of the community and its people. Let us elaborate these points further.

Adolescent sexual health appears to unfold within a **constrictive normative framework** that marks it indelibly. The communicational space for ascertaining rightness and wrongness in matters of sexual health is populated by a battery of factors that seem to constantly and ceaselessly deprive sexual health of the language needed to discern its normative dimension.

First, the normative framework within which the *community* places sexual health appears to constrict the matter to a point of suffocation. This operation takes place in a highly articulated fashion. At a broad level, the adolescents' stories and discussions tell us about the importance and relevance of the community in general, and the community's situation and values in

particular, in the shaping of the understanding of sexual health matters. The examples of the struggling community at the root of the phenomenon of pregnancy are good evidence of this. At a specific level, the community's normative closeness pushes adolescent sexuality to the fringes, confining to a life of shame, exile or more covert exclusion or discrimination. The unease expressed by the adolescents with respect to the squalid space available in the community for the articulation of sexuality constitutes a fundamental component of the overall picture of adolescent sexual health that emerged from the empirical analysis of the stories and discussions.

Second, the *family*, a central network of communication in the life of the adolescents, appears to forcibly impose a normative dimension in its relationship with the adolescents. Although the adolescents make a strong case for the necessity and importance of the family in their everyday life, communication with the family in matters of rightness and wrongness appears to be, to say the least, highly problematic. In particular, the family proves to be unable, and to an extent unwilling, to open up communication with the adolescents on issues that touch on normative aspects of sexual health. Here, the dilemma faced by the adolescents is central. On one hand, the adolescents strongly rely on the family, which provides them with fundamental blueprints that clearly contribute to their processes of individuation and socialisation. On the other hand, the family appears ill equipped to engage in open communication with the adolescents, particularly on thorny matters related to their sexual health. It is important to note, however, that the normative closure shown by the family when communicating with the adolescents does not appear to be restricted to sexual issues. Rather it is a closure that marks the communicative relationship altogether. This structural distortion in communication, however, impacts with particular strength when it comes to matters of sexuality. The normative side of sexuality appears as a no-go area in family-adolescent communication. This gap, so vividly brought to life by the adolescents in their stories and

discussions, is at the same time a powerful marker of a delicate cross-generational mismatch and an endemic trait of the horizon within which adolescent sexual health unfolds.

Finally, *peers* as a central network of communication do not seem to be immune to the constrictive normative framework that haunts communication on sexual health issues. Although communication between peers appears to be more fluid than in the family, the very fluidity that marks the relationship seems to run against two serious obstacles that limit the possibility of subverting the normative constrictions that undermine communication on sexual health. First, fluid communication among peers runs against the rigidity of other networks, in particular the family, opening fronts of conflict that complicate further the matters under discussion. The examples of the handling of pregnancy give testimony to this. Second, fluidly communicating peers frequently get caught in the maze of distortions that characterise sexual health communication. In short, however open and fluid communication among peers may be, the normative rigidity that marks sexual health proves, more often than not, to be near impossible to overcome. The example of the discussions about the sexual act gives evidence of this.

A second central issue about adolescent sexual health that arises from the integration and further abstraction of the findings elaborated in chapters five, six and seven is **the over-ground life of those elements of sexuality that are driven underground** by the prevailing values, norms and actions of the community and its people.

Crucial aspects of the sexual health of adolescents appear driven underground, that is, deprived of a legitimate social space in which to put them in circulation. The sexual act, pregnancy and the termination of pregnancy, for example, were singled out and carefully scrutinised by the adolescents as underground aspects of their sexual health. However, a central

point emerging from the findings is that those aspects which are driven underground possess a very rich life, and more importantly, the signification of this life is fundamental for the understanding by the adolescents of their own sexual health.

Pregnancy and abortion are the main casualties of the lack of legitimate social space. With respect to pregnancy, three points come to the fore. First, the overwhelming disapproval of adolescent pregnancy by the community and the family, tears the pregnant adolescent apart; while biology has endowed her with pregnancy, there is no legitimate social space for her to exist pregnant. Second, peers seem to contribute to, rather than prevent, the process of driving underground the pregnant adolescent, albeit in a less virulent way than the community and the family do so. Third, the harsh conditions of the over-ground life of the pregnant adolescent seem to push her further underground into the network of termination, where interestingly, the over-ground life conditions seem to be less adverse.

There are two key findings with regard to the over-ground life of the termination of pregnancy. First, with respect to the practice of abortion, the relation of the adolescents to the network of abortion appears to be surprisingly easy. There seems to be crystallised knowledge among the adolescents with respect to activating, accessing and negotiating the abortion network. Second, the aborting adolescent appears to find in the over-ground life of an underground practice, a much needed instance of expression that enables her to articulate and communicate anxieties; and, more importantly, by taking part in the network with friends, she re-encounters glimpses of solidarity that restore at least partially the fundamental legitimacy that is lacking in the overall condition of terminating a pregnancy.

*Participatory adolescent sexual health promotion: implications on adolescent sexual health*

How does the conceptual understanding of adolescent participation put forward in this thesis relate in practice terms to the actual health promotion process? The process of collective enactment, observation and problematisation of stories of community and sexuality triggered a fundamental movement with respect to sexual health; it delivered both a genuine social space that enabled discussion of sexual life, and a language that bonded the adolescents carrying out these discussions. In doing so sexuality was invested with a public language, one agreed on and put in motion by the adolescents themselves; a language that emerged from within the social life of their local communities, and that in return, enabled the adolescents to expand their relationship with the social life of their communities. Let us look at this in more detail.

An important aspect of the process of investing sexuality with a language is that the socialisation of sexuality emerges from within, in a bottom-up fashion. Needless to say, as we saw from the stories told and discussed by the adolescents, the emerging language is fed by the local knowledge and practices in circulation in the community. Nevertheless, it is elaborated collectively by the interested parties themselves; it is an achievement of the adolescents, a force that shapes the very understanding of sexuality, stabilises and maintains the social relationships that put adolescents in contact with each other, and acts as a powerful self-clarification resource for each of the young men and women involved in the process. In a nutshell, the adolescents acting together, communicating with each other, enable the materialisation of a language of sexuality.

Language here is world-disclosing language; it is a sexuality-disclosing language. By communicating their sexuality the adolescents are, at the same time, disclosing it. They are putting it before their own eyes, not just before the private eyes of the individual, but before the public eyes of the collective. In turn, in so doing, sexuality discloses before them, shaping them as

individuals, in their relationship with others, and in their relationship with the communities they live in. This sexuality, emerging from within adolescents' collective agency and circulating in communication, reaches deeply indeed. It affects the adolescents that put it in circulation by exercising the binding and bonding force of language. For example, the detailed discussion presented in chapter seven on the issue of becoming pregnant showed on one hand, adolescents experiencing the local horizon within which the language of sexuality is a very problematic resource; and on the other hand, the same adolescents projecting future connections through which sexuality may flourish. The enactment and observation of becoming pregnant illustrates how the language of sexuality, by emerging from within the adolescents taking part, accomplishes numerous feats. Let us look at them in more detail.

First, sexuality is located in its cultural dimension. The adolescents not only elaborated and discussed the cultural dimension of sexuality, but also they generated a language that enabled them to relate sexuality to the many cultural elements present in the community, from beliefs to practices to institutions. The discussions on the community's reaction to pregnant adolescents for example, showed how the phenomenon is critically located and handled by the adolescents within the network of relations that makes the community.

Second, sexuality is connected to its normative dimension. Here is very important to point out the workings of two distinct elements of this process of connection: the bringing into awareness by the adolescents the normative network within which sexuality is located, and the exercise of this awareness vis-à-vis other adolescents, their families, and the community at large. The elaborations and discussions of the attempts made by the pregnant adolescents to break the tight circle of illegitimacy that encloses sexuality explored in chapter seven provide a sound example of this.

Third, sexuality is integrated to its subjective dimension. By discussing the relationship of sexuality to themselves as individuals, the adolescents not only set in motion a fundamental process of self-clarification with respect to sexuality but also, they enacted crucial instances of individual expression of sexuality. These instances enabled them to gain new perspectives when relating sexuality issues to other members of the community. The manifold reactions of the pregnant adolescents to their condition of pregnancy discussed in chapter seven give vivid testimony of this point.

In investing sexuality with a language the adolescents relocated sexuality. Here, we can speak of two fundamental sides to this process: the *movement* of relocation of sexuality, and the new *co-ordinates* of sexuality. As movement, it is collective, and it is legitimated and energised from within. It is a movement, which, in unfolding, shapes its participants as it shapes the environment. With respect to the new co-ordinates of sexuality, the precise new location as much as the new shape and substance are subjected to the creative achievements of the participants involved in relocating it. As such the new co-ordinates of sexuality are, not just accomplishment, but also a responsibility of those taking part.

In conclusion, both the explorations of community and of sexuality carried out by the adolescents appear, when seen from the angle of the processes they set in motion, as two instances of the collective exercise in de-centering experienced by the adolescents taking part in these explorations. When approached from this angle, participatory adolescent sexual health promotion, appears as primarily concerned with generating the conditions that will enable collective de-centering. This process is fundamentally the *creative accomplishment of the adolescents taking part*. For them, it opens up the opportunity to explore and negotiate and settle new meanings for their sexual lives. These meanings, which are none other than everyday life

communicative resources, contribute to potentiate their sexual health, which is understood as a resource for living<sup>5</sup>.

### **3. Limitations and usefulness of this study**

Having summarised the thesis and integrated its main contributions, I will dedicate the next two sections to two important aspects. First, I will recapitulate the main limitations of the work, reminding the reader of certain precautions that need to be borne in mind in considering the findings of the thesis. Second, I will comment on the horizon of possible applications for the understanding of adolescent participation put forward here.

#### *Implications of circumscribing the observational field to the project SaRA*

The reader may recall from chapter four that, at the time of making explicit the research strategy guiding this study, a variety of reasons were provided in support of the advantages of looking at one example, in our case, the project SaRA. In particular, it was argued that studying an actual intervention allows for the exploration of participatory processes as they unfold ‘live’, a concern at the centre of this research. Now it is time to focus on the limitations of this approach.

A first limitation in the research is spatial. Although the study was carried out drawing data from 12 communities in deprived areas of the Coastal, Andean and Jungle regions of Peru, the geographical breadth of the investigation is clearly restricted. It is limited to just a handful of communities that share the condition of being socially and economically excluded. Further, although all 12 communities belong to one nation, that is, to Peru, the findings arising from this study do not necessarily apply to other Peruvian communities not to communities outside Peru.

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<sup>5</sup>See chapter two, section three, for a discussion on WHO’s understanding of health as a resource for living rather than an end.



A second limitation is given by the duration of the research. The data gathered covers a two-year period, from April 1997 to March 1999. It follows that the processes investigated are limited to two years of observation. How would these processes look if studied for longer periods of time? This question cannot be addressed by the current investigation; further research is needed in this respect.

Last but not least, the participation processes studied in this thesis, were focused on the field of adolescent sexual health promotion. Further research will be needed in order to explore the tenability of the concepts put forward here when applied to other fields. In this respect, research in other areas where participation processes are involved, for example, substance misuse or community development programmes in general, may help to better understand the processes at stake when approaching participation in this way.

Summing up, the limitations mentioned above call for caution in the interpretations made or the conclusions drawn from the findings. In our example, the learning generated from systematic observation of Peruvian adolescents from deprived areas of the Coastal, Andean and Jungle regions of the country should be understood as intimately related to both the spatio-temporal context and the participants in the study. It is learning that does not automatically relate to other contexts or other participants. Any application of the lessons learned in this study must be carried out heuristically, that is, as aids to think with rather than as rules to follow through.

#### *Projecting participation as creation*

To conclude, I want to put forward three sets of reflections. The first pertains to the area of participatory adolescent sexual health promotion. The second

relates to the contemporary currency of community participation, and the third touches on the debate on the democratic element of participation.

As discussed in chapter two, a central critique levied against **participatory adolescent sexual health promotion** is the adultist agenda that very often underpins this field. Boldly stated, the adolescents that participate in the promotion of their own sexual health are overtly or covertly manipulated towards the closing of the biosocial gap, towards a patrolled entry into adulthood. As this study has shown, there is a wealth to gain from the retreat of adult manipulation and from the opening of spaces for collective adolescent action. Far from being needed, hegemonic adult intervention undermines participation at its very core, promoting compliance rather than creativity. Adolescent sexual health (as much as adult sexual health) is in desperate need of a language that enables its disclosure. I invite the reader to think about the times they participated in conversation or listened to talks on adolescent sexuality. If they do not recall any, then I invite the reader to try to initiate one. The chances of it turning into a talk on *problems* or on *depravation* are quasi-guaranteed. Adolescent sexuality does not appear to have a language outside the medical, the pathological or the criminal. It is time that such a language begins to be built. Further, the main creators of it, although by no means the exclusive ones, must be the adolescents themselves. A suggestion on how to set this process in motion comes from this study: to open up social spaces with the adolescents for them to exercise their own agency, by collectively drawing on, challenging and re-creating local knowledge.

As mentioned earlier, the issue of participation goes well beyond the field of adolescent sexual health promotion. Calls for stakeholders to participate in shaping their own future appear in the field of health as much as in other areas as diverse as rural development and local government. In particular, the direct participation of the community appears as a common denominator

cutting across these diverse fields. **Community participation** arises as a highly appealing field that attracts the attention of policy makers, researchers and practitioners. This study provides a contribution to this field. It suggests, from a socio-psychological perspective, that the understanding of participatory processes needs to take into account the agency of the people taking part. Further, it proposes ways of doing so by concentrating on the unifying force of language and communication. A social psychology of participation may be in a position to contribute amply to the understanding of the concept of participation. Social psychology's long interest in unravelling the complexities of subjects –who, in becoming more and more individuated become simultaneously more and more interdependent on others– offers a stock of knowledge with great potential to contribute to the understanding of participation processes. As seen in our case of adolescents taking part in promoting sexual health, participation processes entail material and symbolic processes that are collective, situated and argumentative. As such, individuals' identities, as much as social norms and cultural patterns, are affected by the very instance of participation. Further, by conceptualising participatory processes as collective exercises in de-centering, the impact of participation on the people taking part takes a fundamental turn. Participation becomes the medium for the development of reflexivity; a reflexivity that, while helping individuals to apprehend better their uniqueness and singularity, binds self and other in an compelling fashion.

Finally, there is the pressing issue of the relationship between **participation and democracy**, or the roots of democracy. Very often the association of participation to democracy is made in a rushed fashion, considering both issues inherently good and, further, inherently related. I shall argue that this connection must not be made too hastily. It is the case that democracy owes a good deal to social participation, as is sadly witnessed in contemporary examples of democratic deficits provoked by the withdrawal of participation by disenchanted citizens. Young people make up one such group of

disenchanted citizens. What can this study contribute to the understanding of this contemporary problem?

As vividly illustrated by the adolescents' stories and discussions, social participation is in a privileged position to expose many areas of society where democracy appears to be faltering. Seen as a totality, *adolescent issues* constitute a sound example of one such democratic deficit. The adolescent, conceived as a biosocial gap, appears constructed as an *other* that both rejects and projects the normalised adult counterpart. As such, adolescents fall in the regrettably large category of the other, joining numerous others, constructed in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, etc.

As this study has illustrated, adolescent participation not only exposes deficits in the democratic process but it also proposes ways forward; in particular, participation is in a position to both strengthen the participating subjects and to contribute to the democratic process. However, participation as put forward here is an open-ended process, with no guaranteed outcome. For those in positions of power, open participation may siege them into listening to what they may not want to hear, and into acting in ways in which they may not want to act. But for those *others* who engage in open participation, the very openness of the process allows and demands the full exercise of agency; "in a process of enlightenment", Habermas tells us, "there can only be participants"<sup>6</sup>. As such, taking part appears, above all, to bring *others* together to perform, share and celebrate their otherness.

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<sup>6</sup> Habermas, 1973: 40.

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